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AN EXPOSITION

OF

THE REVELATION OF DIVINE GRACE,

AS UNFOLDED IN THE OLD TESTAMENT SCRIPTURES.

BY THE LATE

ROBERT GORDON, D.D., F.R.S.E.,

EDINBURGH.

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PREFACE.

THERE is not much needed by way of Preface or Introduction to this Work. Its leading design is sufficiently obvious, from the title which it bears. The work is an Exposition, in a practical form, of the Revelation of Divine Grace to the Old Testament Church. It traces the course of that Revelation from the time when man, fallen and guilty, received from God himself the first promise of a Saviour, down to the period when the last of the Jewish prophets spoke to his countrymen of Him who was to be the consolation of Israel. But, besides the purpose now indicated of opening up and explaining those successive discoveries of Divine Grace, made through promise, and type, and prophecy to the Church of the olden time,—that progressive revelation which made known to believers, then, by means of views gradually increasing in clearness and detail, CHRIST as the Saviour,—there is another and further object which the Author in this Work had in view

The principles on which God acted towards his Church under the Old Testament economy,—more especially the manner in which he made provision for the salvation of sinners upon a plan of free grace and through faith in a Mediator to come,—are in these volumes exhibited and illustrated. And the Author has shown that the divine principles and procedure manifested in the justification and sanctification of sinners then, are the same as those followed by God in reference to his Church in every age and under every succeeding dispensation; so that it is possible for believers in the present day to recognise, in his conduct towards his people during former times and in the varied details of their spiritual history, the very method of the divine dealings with themselves, and a counterpart of their own Christian experience. In this way the Author identifies the theology of the Old Testament in the gospel of the New, and finds in the trials and triumphs witnessed in the religious life of the Fathers of the Ancient Church, lessons of warning or instruction applicable to our own. It would be unfair, in forming any estimate of this Work, to regard it in one of these points of view, to the exclusion of the other.

It may be right to state, in a single sentence, the ground which this Work professes to occupy, in relation to the two best known treatises in the same department of theology. It differs from the able and admirable "History of Redemption" by President Edwards, in this respect, that it bears more of the aspect of an exposition of Scripture; while, wanting as it does the scholastic

features and the somewhat defective views of the "Christology" of Hengstenberg, it is full of evangelical and practical truth.

In the volumes now published, the Scheme of Grace is considered as it is developed in the Historical Books of the Old Testament alone. They will be followed by other two, expounding the same subject as contained in the Prophetical writings.

It is right to add, that the amount of material left by the Author rendered a selection absolutely necessary; and the selection has been made in such a way as to secure that the subject which it was his aim to illustrate shall be treated in a consecutive manner. The Work labours under the disadvantage of wanting the Author's personal revision and superintendence. It is published as it was written; the only point in which it has been changed, being that a very few passages have been omitted where it is obvious they were intended to serve purposes of a temporary kind.

EDINBURGH, *March* 1854.

CHRIST IN THE OLD TESTAMENT.

I.

CREATION.

GENESIS I. 1.

I HAVE selected these words, not so much for the purpose of expounding their meaning, which is very plain, as with the view of taking occasion from them to make some remarks introductory to a series of expositions which I purpose to offer on the Old Testament Scriptures. I have long had an impression, which my experience and observation have certainly not tended to weaken, that the Old Testament occupies less of the attention of Christians than it ought to do; and I am not without the impression also, that we, whose work it is to expound the Word of God, are to blame for not bringing this portion of divine truth more frequently and fully under the notice of our hearers. It is true, we cannot explain or illustrate the New Testament without frequently, nay, constantly alluding to the Old; and often also detached portions of the latter may be made the immediate subjects of our discourses. But I doubt whether we are sufficiently careful to set forth a connected view of the communications which God has vouchsafed to the children of men, as these have been put down in the Bible, so as to exhibit the gradual development of that scheme of mercy which was announced to our guilty race from the beginning, and was completed in the death of Him "who appeared once in the end of the world, to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself." Yet, assuredly, this is the obvious, the natural way of proceeding in studying the Scriptures.

If God has vouchsafed to give us a revelation of his will,—a revelation delivered at sundry times and in divers manners, containing all that he has thought fit to communicate concerning himself, his character and perfections, the principles of his moral government, and especially his purposes of redeeming grace,—it might naturally occur to us that the best way of studying that revelation is to begin at the beginning; for we might expect to find with regard to the subject which does most nearly concern us to know and understand,—I mean the plan of salvation,—that it is gradually unfolded there, and that, to gain a clear and comprehensive view of it, we must study in their order all the communications concerning it which preceded its full revelation.

The very obvious consideration might also occur, that there can be nothing in a communication from God to the children of men that does not demand their devout and reverential perusal; for the fact that such a communication has been made does itself imply such condescension and mercy on his part as ought to awaken their most profound admiration, and an earnest desire to know and understand his will. We might, indeed, very naturally expect that in a divine communication so extended as the Bible is, there may be some, nay, many things which the most enlarged mind cannot fully comprehend; for where God has said so much about himself and about the great principles of his moral administration, there cannot fail to be a great deal that is to be received on his word alone as true, and regarded as holy, just, and good, though the reason of his procedure may be far beyond the reach of our comprehension. But we may as confidently expect on the other hand, even before we open the book, if we believe it to be a communication from God, that to the humble and teachable reader it will "all be profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness." That there should be truths there announced, and facts stated, which, to the pride of men, may give rise to vain and presumptuous speculations, is only to say that the Word of God is in perfect accordance with his works and his ways, even his creation and providence, in both of which many things are to be met with which cannot be reduced to the humble level of our understanding. But to devout and docile inquirers even these unsearchable things will not be without their use and importance; for what-

ever tends to humble their pride and try their faith,—whatever awakens feelings of admiration and reverence towards God,—must contribute to the advancement of the believer in purity and holiness. And notwithstanding the sublime, and, as they are commonly called, mysterious truths which may be looked for in Scripture, we might confidently reckon on finding in every part of it what is sufficiently plain to convey to the lowliest and most illiterate the knowledge of truths infinitely more important than all that the wisdom of this world could ever teach them.

And what we might thus naturally anticipate before we enter on the study of the Bible, will be found realised by all who bring to the perusal of it a humble and teachable disposition of mind. That divine record commences with an account, very concise indeed, but at once comprehensive and sublime, of the creation of the world, and of the original constitution of man; and, in a manner equally simple and concise, proceeds to relate, as a matter of fact, his fall from that condition, the manner in which it took place, and the consequences with which it has been accompanied. All this is comprehended within the compass of a very few pages, and is so plainly and simply stated as not to require, and hardly to admit of, any lengthened illustration. The statement, indeed, has given rise to manifold speculations among those who would be wise above what is written. But the various and contradictory opinions which have been propounded on the subject of creation generally, and especially on the original constitution of man, and the melancholy change which passed upon him in consequence of the fall, as recorded in the Scriptures, present a striking contrast to the simple majesty with which the Bible relates these momentous facts, and which leaves on every sentence the impress of divine authority. Men may bewilder themselves in vain attempts either to confute or to confirm statements which they are not willing to believe, or about which they are curious to know more than what it was obviously intended to tell them. But to them who are willing to be taught of God,—to learn from his gracious communication what they never otherwise would have known,—these statements will be read with the deepest reverence, and rested in as alike conclusive and satisfactory; and in the very brevity with which the narrative is given, they will see a plain intimation that it is to be received,

without questioning, as the authoritative declaration of Him who is the God of truth, righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works.

In referring, however, to the comparatively small space which the account of creation, of the original condition of man, and of his fall from that condition, occupies in the sacred volume, my object is chiefly to remark that the main subject of the Bible is to reveal the method of man's recovery from his fallen state; so much so, that what has been said of his first condition, and of the way in which he left it, is obviously nothing more than what was necessary to introduce the history of God's dealings with him as a sinful creature, the necessity of these dealings, and the scheme adopted for his restoration. This, it is evident, was what it most nearly concerned mankind to know. It was no doubt of very great importance for them to be told what man originally was, and how he came to be what he now is; and God has graciously vouchsafed to them this information to the full extent, we may be assured, of what it was necessary or useful for them to have it. But nothing has been said to gratify an unprofitable curiosity. The purpose for which a divine revelation was given was far too gracious and merciful to admit of any thing being revealed which could only be a subject of useless speculation. That purpose was to tell men how they might be saved; and accordingly the divine record hastens, as it were, to introduce this grand subject, telling us that at the very commencement of the solemn meeting between God and his apostate creatures, when they were summoned into his presence overwhelmed with conscious guilt, and ere the righteous sentence was yet pronounced, he intimated in their hearing that purpose of grace and mercy which it is the great object of all his subsequent communications to unfold and explain. These communications, it is true, are not limited to simple promises of a coming Saviour, or predictions of what he was to do and endure in carrying into effect the great scheme announced to our first parents. They contain also the history of God's dealings with men both as individuals and as nations, wherein we have exhibited, on the one hand, the most affecting manifestations of the grace, compassion, and forbearance of God, and brought out, on the other, the deplorable depravity and desperate wickedness of the human heart.

But it is on this very account that the Old Testament Scriptures demand our frequent and serious perusal; for while they everywhere present to us, either directly or by inference, the plan of redemption, they bring before us such views of the perfections and moral government of God, and of the character and condition of man, as we cannot conceive to have been so clearly illustrated in any other way. It is no doubt a very plain and a very solemn statement to say, "that all have sinned,"—that "the whole world has become guilty before God,"—"that judgment has come upon all men to condemnation,"—and with such statements the Bible abounds. But this melancholy truth is presented in a light peculiarly fitted to arrest our attention and to affect our hearts, in those histories which are recorded in the Old Testament Scriptures, where we see the actual rebellion of men against the most solemn manifestations of God's sovereignty, and their ungrateful returns for the richest blessings of his providence and his grace. In like manner, it is a very affecting declaration, and one which ought to win the hearts of all who read it, that "the Lord is the Lord God, merciful and gracious, slow to anger, of long-suffering, abundant in goodness, forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin,"—that this "is his name, and that this is his memorial unto all generations." But the same truth is brought with peculiar force to our minds, when we contemplate the actual examples of his forbearance, compassion, and long-suffering patience, with which the Scriptures abound; and when we read his earnest entreaties addressed to those who had multiplied their provocations against him beyond what any but a divine forbearance could have endured. The Old Testament narratives, therefore, are just so many striking illustrations of the great truths which it was the design of the Bible to reveal and to inculcate; and on this ground they claim the diligent and prayerful study of all, as "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness."

But it is especially in reference to the plan of redemption that I think the Old Testament Scriptures ought to be carefully studied, and it is as illustrative of this great subject that I purpose mainly to direct attention to them. Not only do we find in the very first promise of a Saviour a most comprehensive representation of his character and work,—the substance, in fact,

of all that the New Testament has more largely stated,—but throughout the whole we have illustrations of the nature of that work in every variety of form. We find promises of his coming renewed, with such additional circumstances as serve to throw a clearer light on what had been said in the earlier promises. We have ordinances instituted in which the sufferings and death of Christ were exhibited in a more lively and impressive manner than any mere description in words could have set them forth, though even in respect to such verbal descriptions the Old Testament abounds with them, couched, too, in language the most solemn and sublime. In these ordinances we see the great fundamental principle of the transference of guilt from the sinner to his suffering and dying Substitute, presented with a simplicity and force which none could fail to apprehend and feel, were it not for that perverseness of understanding and insensibility of conscience which characterise every sinful child of Adam. We find, moreover, in these Scriptures, besides the institution of ordinances in themselves abundantly significant as prefiguring the great atonement, offices appointed to which men were set apart, and in the execution of which they became types of the Saviour in some one or other view of his character, it being impossible that any one office to which men may be devoted could adequately set forth the work of Him who in his own person undertook and executed every office which the necessities of poor perishing sinners could require. And, finally, we find in the same rich and varied record, predictions of Christ's triumphs, the greatness of his majesty, the glory of his kingdom, the extent, even the universality of his government, of the fulfilment of which all that is recorded in the New Testament of the victories which the gospel had then won, and all that has been accomplished during the subsequent ages of the Christian church, great and glorious as these have been, are only the commencement,—mere pledges of the power and faithfulness of God, intended to keep alive the faith and hope of his church, and to give them the assurance that he will, in his own good way and time, fulfil every one word which he spake unto the fathers by his servants the prophets.

Now, in some of these predictions, and indeed in some things in all the other departments of Scripture, there may be a darkness

and a difficulty of interpretation which even the most teachable and prayerful reader may not be able to remove or surmount. But in all the different portions of that marvellous record,—in Moses, in the Psalms, and in the Prophets,—there will be found enough to exercise the minds of the most experienced and enlightened of true believers, and enough also to furnish to the weakest and the least advanced abundant matter of devout meditation, and the means also of growing in grace, and in the knowledge of Him whom to know is life everlasting. I am persuaded that they who have most deeply studied and who have been longest conversant with the Old Testament Scriptures, will be the first to acknowlege the truth of these remarks; for they must be aware that to these Scriptures they are indebted, not only for some of the most sublime of the conceptions which they have been enabled to form of the character and perfections of God, but also for not a little of what they clearly see and understand of the method of salvation through the atoning sacrifice of a crucified Redeemer. Indeed, with all the indifference and neglect which I fear the Old Testament meets with, the devout readers of the New Testament must have felt the necessity of making themselves in some measure acquainted with the former, inasmuch as they must have found, that it was only in this way they could fully understand some of the most interesting and important parts of the writings of the evangelists and apostles. As no small portion of the New Testament was addressed to Jews, or to those who were acquainted with or proselytes to the Jewish religion, it abounds with allusions to Old Testament history and institutions, as illustrative of the great fundamental truths which it teaches. In fact, it seems to take for granted, that they who are truly anxious to understand these truths will not contentedly remain unacquainted with what had been revealed under the old dispensation; for while it is true, on the one hand, that the evangelists and apostles have opened up the treasures of heavenly wisdom and knowledge which are contained in Moses and in the prophets, as they never could otherwise have been unlocked,—it is equally true, on the other hand, that Moses and the prophets furnish a commentary on and illustrations of the New Testament writings, which are nowhere else to be found,—illustrations but for which a great deal of these writings must have remained dark and un-

intelligible. And so every man must have found who has been called upon to communicate religious instruction. After some experience in that work, I can say without hesitation, that were I required to explain the gospel method of salvation to one who had never before heard of the Bible, but who was willing to hear what the great truth is which it professes to teach, I would begin my exposition to him with the book of Genesis; and though I certainly would not attempt a minute explanation of every chapter of every book, I would bring before him the leading points of the Old Testament,—its promises, predictions, and types,—and show him their consummation in the death of Him who exclaimed on the cross, "It is finished." I would read or relate to him the creation of the world, the original state in which man was made, and the history of his fall from that state; and starting then with the first promise, "The seed of the woman shall bruise the head of the serpent," I would endeavour to conduct him through the various illustrations of this promise with which the Old Testament abounds, till I brought him to almost the very close of the New Testament, where the inspired apostle, the longest lived of all the apostles, sums up the whole of what his inspired brethren and himself had recorded of Christ and his finished work, in substantially the very words of the first intimation of a Saviour, "For this purpose was he manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil." He was born of a woman, that he might bruise the serpent's head.

After these remarks, I need hardly say that I think the simple and elementary truths of Christianity are to be best learned from the Old Testament. And I cannot help taking this opportunity of drawing attention to the great use which may be made of that book in the instruction of the young. None who have been seriously engaged in the religious tuition of children, and have really been anxious to convey clear and distinct ideas on the subject of their teaching, can have failed to experience the difficulty of making themselves understood, while stating and endeavouring to explain even the simplest truths, when presented in an abstract form,—I mean as they are put down even in that unrivalled of human works, our Shorter Catechism. At least, such is my own experience. But I can also state, as a matter of experience too, that as often as in such cases I betook myself to the

Old Testament for help, it never failed me. It furnished illustrations so simple and so abundant, that there was no longer any difficulty in speaking intelligibly, and seldom an instance in which these illustrations failed to arrest attention and to awaken interest. Those who are conversant with the New Testament will find the gospel everywhere in the Old, and that in connection with such narratives, such incidents, such manifestations of character, as have a peculiar charm for the youthful mind, and a peculiar power for laying hold of the youthful memory. Would that Christian mothers always understood and acted upon this principle! I say mothers, because to their care and culture is entrusted the earliest, and, in some respects, the most important period of the life of the rising generation,—that period during which children are susceptible of impressions, and capable, moreover, of imbibing ideas, which may exercise a powerful influence for good or for evil on the whole of their future character and conduct,—and the period also to the right improvement of which an exceeding precious promise is given, —"Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." To all in such circumstances, and who are laid under such responsibilities, I would say, that if they have not made the experiment, they cannot conceive how greatly the Old Testament Scriptures would aid them in their endeavours to make their children acquainted with God, and Christ, and eternal things.

I cannot, of course, enter at present on any lengthened detail of examples in illustration of this remark. Besides, one object of the observations which I purpose to offer on the leading passages of the Old Testament will be to show how the truths therein stated and illustrated may be made subservient to the important purpose of youthful education. But I am persuaded that there are many who require only a hint to show them what a rich storehouse they have there, out of which to draw in abundance materials for occupying the opening minds of their children with wholesome, because heavenly instruction, even before they are themselves capable of reading the holy lessons of the Bible. And before proceeding to make this use of the lessons therein contained, let them be careful to peruse the passages with a prayerful frame of spirit for their own edifica-

tion, and then they will be prepared to state them to their children with simplicity and affectionate earnestness, just as they would labour to impress upon them any thing that they think essential to their temporal comfort and well-being. And were this the daily practice of parents, gone about with the same liveliness and vigour with which they labour to provide for the worldly respectability of their children, they might, with good hope, look forward to the happy fruits of their labour, and could hardly fail to experience great benefit to their own souls; for while the Old Testament abounds with narratives which may be rendered intelligible to the youngest, it is equally rich in the statement of truths and the exposition of principles sufficient to exercise the wisest and most advanced in the Christian life. It is all given by the "inspiration of God,"—it is all "profitable for instruction in righteousness,"—it is, to all who read it in simplicity of mind, and with a teachable frame of spirit, "a lamp unto the feet and a light unto the path."

I have thus stated very briefly, and I fear very imperfectly, some of the reasons why the Old Testament Scriptures should occupy more of the attention of Christians than I suspect is bestowed upon them by many who bear the Christian name. I stated at the commencement of this exposition, that it was not my intention to enter on any lengthened illustration of the words which I then referred to; and in the course of my remarks I have also stated, that in entering on the consideration of this portion of the sacred volume, my chief object is to direct attention to the illustrations of the divine scheme of salvation, with which it is everywhere fraught, and from which the simple and elementary truths of the gospel may be most easily, and, I may add, most clearly learned. My plan, therefore, does not require that I should enter minutely or at great length on the exposition of the first chapters of this book, wherein we have recorded the creation of all things by the word of God's power, and the formation of man after God's own image,—the circumstances in which man was originally placed as admitted to frequent and friendly intercourse with his Maker,—and the fatal act of disobedience by which he forfeited at once his honour and his happiness. But, besides, what can be said in the way of illustrating the chapter at present under consideration? It is too simple to require any explana-

tion, and infinitely too sublime to admit of being made the subject of any lengthened discourse. I would only remark, that if we would contemplate God in all the majesty of omnipotence, and in all the glory of his infinite skill and wisdom, we must read and ponder this chapter, where it is said of him that he reared the fabric of this mighty and complicated world, and clothed it with beauty surpassing all that we have ever seen or conceived of, by his simple word,—that he said, "Let there be light, and there was light,"—that, in bringing out of nothing the whole system of nature, animate and inanimate, the simplest object in which baffles the wisdom of the wisest to comprehend it, "he spake only and it was done, he commanded and all things stood fast." And assuredly it can never be an unprofitable exercise thus to meditate on Him "who is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working."

But to those who are familiar with the New Testament, this account of the creation of all things by the word of God's power can hardly fail to suggest another and a new creation, still more glorious in itself, and in which men are still more deeply interested,—even that new order of things which has already in part arisen, and which will yet still more gloriously arise out of the mediatorial work of Christ; when immortal, intelligent creatures shall have been raised from spiritual debasement and misery to glory and honour, surpassing all that ever man was, even when originally bearing the impress of the divine image; and when, instead of a world now filled with disorder and suffering in consequence of sin, there shall be new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness. The Author of this new creation is emphatically called "The Word of God"—"by whom," it is expressly declared, "all things were made," and "without whom was not any thing made that was made." Christ is thus identified, both by the name which is given to him and the work which is ascribed to him, with the glorious Person spoken of in this chapter, and of whom it is said "he spake and it was done, he commanded and all things stood fast." And while, therefore, we dwell with reverence and admiration on the manifestation of his almighty power, unsearchable wisdom, and unbounded beneficence, as given in the account of creation, we are naturally, I might almost say irresistibly, led to contemplate the still brighter

display of his glory as the restorer of all things, when he shall have completed that mediatorial work for the accomplishment of which he is now exalted at the right hand of God. If there are any, therefore, who have studied the Old Testament less frequently, on the ground that little of the gospel is to be found there, I would direct them to the very first sentence of that book, in which they will find it testified that He in whom they trust, and about whose character and work they are most anxious to have their thoughts occupied in their seasons of retirement and devotion, is the "God who in the beginning created the heavens and the earth,"—who said, "Let there be light, and there was light," —who, in the fulness of time, appeared to be "the light of the world," when sunk in ignorance and death,—and who by his Spirit "has shined into their hearts, to give them the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

II.

MAN UNFALLEN.

GENESIS II. 1.

It being the chief object, then, of these expositions to set forth the gospel as it is unfolded and illustrated in the Old Testament Scriptures, my plan does not require, as I have before stated, that I should enter on any minute consideration of the first chapters of this book. These record the creation of the world generally, and of man particularly; the condition in which he was originally placed, and the way in which he fell from that estate; subjects in themselves very grand and very interesting, but which are compressed within the space of a few pages, while the record hastens on, so to speak, to announce and to unfold the marvellous scheme of the recovery, even the redemption of sinners by a sinless and suffering Mediator. I do not, therefore, think it necessary to say more than I very briefly stated in my former remarks on the subject of creation itself, or on what it very naturally suggests, and what it is employed in the New Testament to illustrate, even that new creation which is to arise out of Christ's mediatorial work,—that work by which he has already removed from men who believe in him the curse which came upon them by the fall, and will one day remove from the earth itself its share of the same curse, even on that day when there shall be new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness, and when it will be said of this new moral creation, as it was originally said of the formation of the

world, "God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good." I proceed to consider, with equal brevity, the chapter from which the passage before us is taken. That chapter refers mainly to the condition and circumstances in which man was originally placed,—his occupation, and his enjoyment,—the object of all which is to show that he was happy because he was holy, because he lived in the enjoyment of communion with God, and delighted in that communion. With regard to his original constitution, we are told in the preceding chapter that he was created in the image of God; for "God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image: in the image of God created he him." Now that we are fallen creatures, and have lost this divine image, we are naturally incapable of forming any definite, far less any adequate idea of what is implied in this marvellous language. Yet, if we believe that there is a God, and that he is possessed of all perfection and blessedness, we might infer that man's original condition was one of great purity and happiness, seeing it could be said of him that he was formed in the image of his Creator.

And if by the teaching of God's Spirit we have been enlightened in the knowledge of what is elsewhere stated in his Word, we must have seen in this account of man's creation a very comprehensive view of some of the most profound truths of Revelation. It will remind all who have been so enlightened, of the great fundamental doctrine of the Trinity, three Persons in the Godhead; for that doctrine, I think, is plainly referred to, or rather expressed, not only in the language employed, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness," but also in the mysterious nature of man himself, of whom it is said in a subsequent verse of this chapter, that "the Lord God formed him of the dust of the ground; and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul." That such is the constitution of man,—that he is a being consisting of soul and body, or rather, as the apostle intimates, of soul, body, and spirit,—is a matter of fact with which we are all familiar. Yet how incomprehensible is this constitution! Just as incomprehensible as the

existence of God himself. And when it is said, therefore, that God created man in his own image, might it not be, in reference to this fearfully and wonderfully constructed frame of human nature, to remind men, when they quarrel with the mysteriousness of the doctrine of three in one, that they carry about with them a mystery equally dark,—a mode of existence which it transcends their capacity to understand? But the account of man's creation will suggest also to Christians that he was made in the likeness of God in this respect, that it was the likeness in which, according to the eternal counsels of heaven, God appeared, when for the salvation of lost sinners he condescended for a season to tabernacle among men, "in very deed dwelling with them on the earth;" and the likeness in which he ascended up on high, leading captivity captive, that as Mediator he might be invested with all authority in heaven and in earth, angels, and principalities, and powers being made subject unto him. And, finally, it will remind them of the explanation which the apostle has given of the expression, "image of God," when he describes the effect intended to be produced, and which is actually produced, on all by the saving knowledge and faith of the gospel, even that of being "created again in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, after the image of him who created them." And thus, at the very commencement of the sacred volume, and in the few words which are employed to describe man's original constitution, Christians are reminded of, or rather, have brought distinctly before them, the great leading doctrines of the gospel, especially that which tells them that there is still, even for fallen creatures, a state of holy conformity to the divine will, after which it is alike their duty and their privilege to aspire, and in the attainment of which they are to find their true and permanent happiness.

Did our plan admit, we might dwell at length on the great truths to which we have thus adverted, and show that from the beginning the same great doctrines pervade the whole of the divine revelation. But I proceed to consider the circumstances in which man was originally placed, as they are set forth in the chapter before us. The purpose for which these have been recorded is obviously to show us, that the place which man occupied was one of great honour and happiness; and the method

adopted for conveying to us some idea of his original dignity and blessedness is especially deserving our notice. We cannot doubt that the main source of man's happiness in a state of innocence was the perfect conformity of his will to the will of his Creator, and that the highest enjoyment of his nature consisted in the exercise of all those feelings and affections which the character and perfections of God, so far as these were revealed to him, were fitted to awaken. But to men in their fallen state the description of such happiness could have conveyed no clear or definite idea. While unenlightened and unrenewed by the Spirit of God, they can form no conception of any enjoyment derived from such a source; and even by the holiest of men in the present life,—those who have been renewed in the spirit of their minds,—that enjoyment can be but very imperfectly understood. Had men, therefore, been but simply told that Adam was made in the image of God, or even if this account of his constitution had been followed up by a representation of the holy joy and satisfaction which he experienced in being conformed to the likeness of God and admitted to communion with him, they might perhaps have inferred that he must have been happy; but they could not have distinctly conceived of the happiness itself. But in the representation which is here given of the condition and circumstances in which man was placed, there is a great deal fitted to convey a clear idea of the happiness which he enjoyed. That happiness is set forth by the help of outward and sensible things, intelligible to every capacity. All things, we are told, were provided and prepared for him before he was made, and when he was made all things were given up to him; for it is said in the preceding chapter that "God blessed them, and said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat." And in the chapter before us, where we have a more detailed account of the creation and disposal of man, we are told that, rich and beautiful as the whole world was, God selected a spot for the more immediate dwelling-place of the man whom he had formed; and it is very plainly intimated, I think, that it was in an especial manner enriched and adorned by the wisdom and beneficence of the Creator, that it might be a fitting abode for a creature whom

he had made after his own image. "The Lord God," we are told, "planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground made the Lord God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food."

On what a scene of loveliness, then, did man at first open his eyes! The almighty, the all-wise, the all-bountiful Creator himself had pronounced it very good; and who can conceive the beauty, the grandeur, the magnificence of which God himself thus spoke? Nay, it is said of Him "who fainteth not, neither is weary," that he rested from all his works which he had created and made,—language which, as applied to God, can only be understood as meaning that he looked with complacency on the works of his hand, the exercise of his own adorable perfections, the manifestation of his wisdom, power, and beneficence. Man's existence, then, began with a Sabbath of holy enjoyment,—a Sabbath spent, we cannot doubt, in the pure and devout admiration of a world lovely and glorious beyond any thing that we can now conceive,—even a world in the contemplation of which the Creator himself is elsewhere said "to have rested and been refreshed." And while there was thus every thing that could exercise and gratify the faculties of man's soul, there was nothing to disturb or distract. To every unholy and irregular passion he was an utter stranger. There was no suspicion haunting him from within,—there was nothing to awaken his fear from without. He was in possession of a feeling of absolute security; for not only was he beyond the reach of all external violence, but by the immediate grant of his Creator, the Possessor of heaven and of earth, he was invested with dominion over all things to the full extent of what he could desire, or they could be rendered subservient to his happiness. Here, then, is a state of blessedness of which we can form some conception, however inadequate that conception may be; and independently, therefore, of the more exalted happiness which he derived from spiritual communion with God, that beneficent Creator in whom he saw nothing to excite his dread, but every thing to awaken his confidence, there is enough in the account here given of the circumstances in which he was originally placed to satisfy us that his condition was one of honour, and dignity, and unmingled blessedness.

But though the passage before us naturally suggests these views of man's state of innocence, and places the happiness of that state in a very simple and intelligible point of view; yet we are not to forget that, while he was thus conversant with the works of God, and found therein room for the active exercise of the powers of his body, as well as the faculties of his soul, he was, at the same time, in the enjoyment of converse or communion with God himself. And though this is a kind of enjoyment of which we can conceive only in so far as, by the Spirit of God, we have been transformed into the likeness of Christ, and at the best, in this present state, but very imperfectly; yet even this spiritual condition of Adam is placed in a very clear and simple point of view by the narrative before us. Instead of telling us, in the form of an abstract proposition, that man was permitted to enjoy fellowship with his Maker, it gives us, in detail, occasions on which he is represented as holding immediate converse with God. In what precise manner this intercourse or communication was carried on, it is not needful to inquire. But we cannot doubt that it must have been as direct and as explicit as in the case of Moses at a later period, and in a far different state of things, of whom it is nevertheless said, that "the Lord spake unto him face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend." So it must assuredly have been with Adam, when "the Lord God took him, and put him into the garden of Eden," and explained to him the purpose for which he was put there, even "to dress it and to keep it." So it must have been also when "the Lord God commanded him, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." In like manner, there must have been direct converse between God and Adam, when there were brought to him all the beasts of the field, and all the fowls of the air, that he might give a name to every living creature. And, finally, there must have been the same direct communication from God, when he brought Eve to Adam, and established that most sacred of all human relationships,—the relation of husband and wife.

It is plain from these various instances, recorded with such simplicity, that man was admitted to frequent converse or com-

munion with God; and it is equally plain, from the nature of the intercourse therein referred to, that it must have been a source of the purest satisfaction and delight. The subject of that intercourse, in every one of these instances, bore testimony to the divine beneficence towards Adam. Eve was brought to him, because it was not good for him to be alone,—and therefore God provided an help meet for him. In having the beasts of the field and the fowls of the air presented to him, that he might give them their names, there was a new and obvious pledge given to him of his dominion over all the creatures of God, and of their subserviency to his happiness. And in the command which he received concerning the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, there was an assurance not only of his undisturbed but his permanent enjoyment of at least all the happiness which he then possessed when God took him and put him into the garden which he had planted and prepared for him, and in which he found exercise for all his powers and faculties, without satiety and without weariness. "And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat." When we bear in mind that this was said of the richest and loveliest spot of a world which was all rich and lovely beyond any human conception, — a spot selected and adorned by God himself to be a fitting abode for him whom he had constituted lord of all his works here below,—a spot of which it is said with great simplicity, but, on that very account, with great emphasis and depth of meaning, that "out of it the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food;" and when we reflect that this grant of all that it contained of what was beautiful and sweet, was absolute and unconditional, with one solitary exception,—the exception of a single tree; who can form any right estimate of the large, the almost unlimited licence which was thus given to man for the enjoyment of all that it was befitting him to enjoy? And even the very restriction was accompanied with the announcement of the richest and most valuable boon which God had yet bestowed. "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." No doubt this was a very solemn prohibition, and guarded by a very awful sanction,—especially when we bear in

mind that the death threatened, as it is everywhere explained in Scripture, implied the loss of the divine favour, and exposure to the divine displeasure,—the being "punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power." But even the threat itself was very gracious; for while it announced nothing more than what must of necessity have taken place from the holiness of the divine nature, it was fitted to put man on his guard against any attempt to draw him away from his allegiance,—a warning the want of which, if it had not been vouchsafed to him, would assuredly have been bitterly complained of, if not by Adam, at least by his apostate children, and pleaded, moreover, as other things have with far less show of reason been pleaded, as an excuse for their being sinners.

But even this is the smallest part of the grace and condescension manifested in the prohibition laid upon man against eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. That prohibition was accompanied with a virtual but very plain declaration, that so long as man abstained from the one forbidden act of eating of that tree, he should not die; for it is obvious that this was implied or assumed in the threatening. Here, then, was a promise, which God was nowise under an obligation to give,—even the promise of eternal life; for as he had of his own free will and divine beneficence bestowed upon man a happy existence, who could have found fault though that existence had not been made everlasting? And what more could have been said or done to induce a reasonable creature to hold fast his loyalty to his Sovereign, and abide by the law of his God? Every dictate of enlightened self-interest, every feeling of gratitude, every thing that hope or fear could suggest, was on the side of his remaining steadfast to God's covenant, his repelling every insinuation that would have awakened discontentment with his almost unlimited range of enjoyment, and rejecting as false every promise that professed to hold out to him an accession to his blessedness. And to strengthen and confirm him in this holy resolution, there was given him a visible sign, which in due time might have been to him a seal of the promise of eternal life; for while the tree of the knowledge of good and evil stood before him, a sure and significant intimation that if he eat thereof or touched it he should die, the tree of life was placed in the midst of the garden,

an equally sure pledge that if he obeyed he should live for ever. Man did nevertheless disobey and die; and his fall is a subject which, in our present state, we shall never be able fully to comprehend. It is a subject, moreover, which has given rise to much daring speculation and many presumptuous questions, which I do not pretend to solve or set at rest. But I feel assured, that if the Bible account of that event, and of what preceded it, were perused more frequently, and in a state of mind accordant with the divine simplicity of the narrative, there would have been much fewer of such questions and speculations; for none, I think, can seriously peruse this second chapter of Genesis, and reflect on all the means that were employed and the care that was taken to provide for man's blessedness in his original state, without being constrained to justify the divine procedure towards him, and to acknowledge that "God is righteous in all his ways and holy in all his works."

I cannot conclude this short sketch of the contents of the chapter before us, without adverting for a moment to two remarkable circumstances which we find in it, the one at the commencement, and the other at the close. I allude to the institution of the Sabbath, and the ordinance of marriage. Of the first it is said, that "on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made." And of the last it is said, "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh." I need not remind any who are familiar with the Bible, that these institutions are elsewhere represented as of the holiest and most sacred nature; and that the violation of them is set forth as a very heinous sin in the sight of God,—that which he will assuredly visit with the infliction of his righteous judgment. What I would especially remark is the fact that both were instituted while man was yet in a state of innocence,—a fact which, with every thinking man, must invest them with a very peculiar, an awful sanctity. And has not God in the course of his providence, as that is unfolded in the history of the world, borne testimony in abundance to the honour which he puts on his own institu-

tions? for has not the violation of these institutions in all ages given rise to disorder and crime in every form, and proved the forerunner of misery and ruin both to individuals and to communities? I attempt no comparison between the character of our community in the present day, and what it has been in former times, and shall not therefore assert that the divine institutions referred to are more frequently violated or more lightly esteemed now than they have been at other periods. But I fear I am fully warranted to say, that, in regard to both, there is a disregard of the divine authority,—a levity, if not a profligate contempt for the sanctity of the divine law, prevalent enough to fill every devout mind with sorrow and sadness.

Against such gross profanations of what God has so solemnly pronounced holy, and the sanctity of which he has so frequently vindicated by the manifestation of his righteous judgments, it may perhaps appear unnecessary to warn professing Christians,—those at least whose walk and conversation do in any good measure correspond with their profession. Be it so. But even they,—even the most sincere and consistent Christians,—may require to be reminded that in reference to abounding iniquity, it is not enough that they are not chargeable with actually partaking of that iniquity in its outward and flagrant form. They are not free from the guiltiness of that abounding iniquity if thereby their love waxeth cold; and they require, therefore, to be warned, lest, by the prevalence of profane or immoral sentiments and practices, they should become familiarised with them, and so lose that feeling of holy abhorrence of their nature, and that zealous concern for the honour of the divine law, which they are required to cherish and to manifest. Such has been the character of the saints in all ages when in a healthy frame of spirit, as is abundantly evident from the lamentations which they uttered, as recorded in Scripture, over the prevailing iniquities of their day; and I fear it will be found that, in reference to the sins to which I am alluding, every godly man has too much reason "to sigh and to cry for the abominations that be done in the land," and to say with the Psalmist, "I beheld the transgressors and was grieved; because they kept not thy word."

III.

FIRST PROMISE.

GENESIS III. 15.

I HAVE already had occasion to consider at some length the condition in which Adam was made, and the constitution under which he was placed. "God created man," we are told, "in his own image," and gave him dominion over the earth, and over every thing therein; and in this state of dignity and blessedness he was placed by his Creator in the garden of Eden, with this simple but very solemn requirement, "Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it; for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." In this command, or rather prohibition, there was obviously involved a promise, namely, that the blessed existence into which man had been called by the almighty word of his Creator, but the permanency of which depended on the sovereign pleasure of God, should be perpetual; for it was very plainly intimated that if he never ate of the forbidden fruit he should never die. Such a pledge or promise, therefore, can only be regarded as an act of the purest beneficence on the part of God.

But in dealing with a rational and accountable creature, it seemed befitting, in the wisdom and rectitude of God, to secure to him the permanency of his happy existence, to which he had no claim, only on such a condition as might provide, on the one hand, for that acknowledgment of absolute dependence which is

due from the creature to the Creator, or demonstrate, on the other, in the event of man's transgression, the guilt and moral turpitude of disobedience to the divine authority. A condition was accordingly prescribed, illustrative alike of the justice and the beneficence of God. It consisted in a prohibition respecting a matter in itself absolutely indifferent, running counter to no urgent propensity of his nature, requiring of him no effort, and subjecting him to no sort of privation; and it was sanctioned by a penalty the most tremendous in its import, involving the loss of all that constituted the glory and the blessedness of his being. "Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die."

Yet, notwithstanding all that had been done to make his condition a happy one, and all that had been said to warn him of the consequence of falling from that condition, he did give ear to the voice of the tempter,—he took of the forbidden fruit,—he ate,—and died. He did not, indeed, die in the ordinary sense of that word. But from that hour he became subject to disease, decay, and dissolution. He felt, and could not help acknowledging, that he was spiritually dead, inasmuch as, under the terror of conscious guilt, he sought to hide himself from the presence of God,—that bountiful Creator in whose fellowship he once delighted. And when summoned from his hiding-place by the almighty word of Him who called him into being, he had nothing to look for but the execution of a sentence which he felt to be terrible, but the extent of which he could not conceive of. All this is related in the chapter before us with a brevity and simplicity which seem to forbid speculation; and having stated the fact, the narrative proceeds to announce what it is the great purpose of the Bible to unfold and explain,—the method of redemption by Jesus Christ.

The first intimation that was given of this gracious purpose is contained in the words of the verse before us; and independently of the import of the intimation itself, which is alike interesting and profound, there is something peculiarly worthy of notice in the manner in which it is announced. At the moment when man was summoned to a reckoning for the disobedience of which he had been guilty, it was obviously befitting

that there should be a manifestation of the divine rectitude, such as to set upon that disobedience the mark of God's holy displeasure. Nothing else, indeed, could have been looked for but a manifestation of wrath, inasmuch as the covenant which had been violated made no provision either for a delay in the infliction, or for a mitigation in the amount of the penalty, and if such a delay, therefore, did take place, it was in the exercise of mercy and forbearance.

But even although there had been, and really was, an eternal counsel of peace on behalf of fallen man, and though it was the gracious purpose of God partially to intimate this at the very moment of man's apostacy, still it was befitting that the righteousness of God should be manifested in the manner of making the intimation, so that no ground might be given to allege that God had departed from the principle which he had already announced, when he declared death to be the wages of sin. We find, accordingly, that such was the manner in which he first made known his design of mercy towards sinners. Though the verse under consideration does most distinctly intimate such a design, and, in fact, contains a summary of all that was afterwards revealed concerning the redemption of the world by Jesus Christ, yet it was announced in the form of a threatening, or rather as a sentence of condemnation; nor is there any thing in the whole of the communing which took place on the occasion referred to in the passage before us, but the solemn and successive declarations of God's righteous judgment on all the parties concerned in the violation of his commandment. "Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee. And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." But it was in the sentence passed upon the ser-

pent that the full manifestation of the divine wrath was made to appear; and it is peculiarly worthy of remark, that the promise of a Saviour to man which that sentence involved in it was in reality the severest part of the doom that was denounced against the tempter. It was in the form and character of the serpent that the great enemy of mankind successfully practised his malignant subtlety on our first parents; and it was in this character that sentence of condemnation was passed upon him. As if to mark more emphatically the hatefulness of the deed of which he had been the prime mover, and to show that none who were in any way accessory to the perpetration of that deed could escape the infliction of the divine displeasure, a curse was pronounced on the animal which he had personated, and it was doomed to bear about with it a perpetual memorial of its share in the revolt against the divine government. "And the Lord God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life: and I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel."

The argument by which the tempter seduced our first parents was a direct contradiction of a solemn declaration of God,—an avowed impeachment of the divine veracity; and it was befitting, therefore, that it should be visited, not only in those who believed, but in him also who had dared to advance, such an impious charge, with an unequivocal expression of the divine displeasure. It was accordingly so visited in the degradation and debasement to which the serpent was condemned, as well as in the enmity that took place between him and the party whom he had by professions of kindness seduced into rebellion; and the effects of this sentence still exhibit a standing testimony to the unchangeableness of the veracity which had been impiously impeached. But the true import of the curse to which we refer is to be found in the confusion and defeat to which the author of this malignant and apparently successful scheme against the innocence and happiness of man was here doomed by a sure and irreversible decree of Jehovah. The seed of the woman, fallen and degraded as she was through his subtlety,

was one day to overthrow his kingdom,—to "bruise his head;" and he was to be an eternal monument of the very truth which he had dared to deny, "The wages of sin is death."

But while the sentence thus passed upon the serpent was altogether a thing of wrath and condemnation, and while nothing was addressed either to him or to our first parents but expressions of God's righteous displeasure, yet the judgment denounced against the tempter did nevertheless involve in it an intimation of the divine purposes respecting the salvation of men by a Redeemer. It is abundantly evident from particular passages, as well as from the general tenor of Scripture, that Christ is the person here spoken of, inasmuch as we find explicitly applied to him elsewhere, and that too in the way of eminence or distinction, the very language which is employed in the passage before us. To say nothing of the actual history of his incarnation, which is itself a most luminous commentary on this verse, we find the apostle particularly adverting to it as essential to the character of Christ as Mediator that he was the seed of the woman; for, "when the fulness of the time," says he, "was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." And, in like manner, we find the execution of the sentence here passed upon the serpent represented as the great object for which Christ came into the world. Our Lord himself declared towards the close of his personal ministry, "Now is the judgment of this world; now shall the prince of this world be cast out;" and on a subsequent occasion, "The prince of this world cometh, but findeth nothing in me." The apostle Paul, speaking of the death of Christ, and of the blessed effects with which it has been followed, says of it, that he thereby "spoiled principalities and powers, and made a show of them, openly triumphing over them in his cross." It is elsewhere said, that "forasmuch as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, Jesus also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death," or by suffering death, "he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." And another apostle has declared, that "for this purpose was the Son of God manifested,

that he might destroy the works of the devil." It appears, then, that the passage we are considering does in reality contain not only a concise intimation, but a most comprehensive statement of the plan of redemption,—that eternal counsel of peace between the Father and the Son for the salvation of sinners, which is usually denominated the Covenant of Grace.

It is obvious, then, from the whole tenor of Scripture, that the Surety in the Covenant of Grace, he who undertook to fulfil all its conditions, in the way both of obedience and of suffering, was the second Person of the Trinity,—the eternal Word,—the Father's equal. But as God had solemnly declared to Adam, "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die," and as, in impious contradiction to this truth, the devil had said, "Ye shall not surely die," and as it was by believing this lie, in opposition to the word of God, that our first parents were seduced into apostacy, if Christ's mediation was to be available for the salvation of the guilty, by furnishing grounds whereon they might be justified, it was necessary that he should die, and necessary, therefore, that he should place himself in circumstances where it was possible for him to die, for in no other way could the divine rectitude and veracity be vindicated.

The Scriptures do accordingly testify that "the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us,"—that "he who was in the form of God, and thought it not robbery to be equal with God, took upon him the form of a servant,"—that "he was made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law,"—that "God sent his Son in the likeness of sinful flesh,"—and that "forasmuch as the children are made partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same;" and as if to prevent the possibility of our misapprehending the import of these statements, an inspired evangelist was commissioned to record at length the history of our Lord's incarnation, that we might have every assurance which it is possible to give us, that Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified and put to death, was verily man, but that he was at the same time "the Prince of life,"—"the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person,"—"God manifest in the flesh." Still, however, he appeared in our nature, susceptible of all the pains, and sufferings, and sinless infirmities to which our

nature is liable, and was actually subjected to these in all their bitterness and complicated variety; and he was in the character of a man exposed to the most malignant artifices and assaults of the great adversary whose devices he had come to defeat, and whose kingdom he was to overthrow.

How far the tempter understood the real character of Christ, or to what extent he perceived the momentous consequences that were suspended on our Lord's finishing the work which his Father had given him to do, it is impossible for us to determine. But it cannot, I think, be doubted, that he so far understood both the character of Christ and the object of his mission, as to perceive that the defeat of that object was the most important to the interests of his kingdom, and the maintenance of his domination over the children of men, of all the enterprises in which he had ever engaged, and that the circumstances, moreover, in which our Lord appeared afforded him some ground to expect that his enterprise might possibly be successful. It is impossible to peruse the history of our Lord's temptation in the wilderness without observing that the tempter betook himself on that occasion to the very same artifice whereby he had seduced our first parents; that his great object was to represent God's dealing with Christ as unreasonably rigorous and severe; and that all his skill and malignity were put forth, in order to awaken in our Lord's human soul one feeling of distrust, and to extort from him one expression of dissatisfaction with the appointments of his heavenly Father.

That it was competent for our Lord, as possessed of divine power, to have overwhelmed the prince of darkness in terror and dismay by the mere exercise of that power, if so it had seemed meet to infinite wisdom, is abundantly evident from the horror with which unclean spirits were seized in his presence. But in dealing with rational and accountable creatures, the demonstrations of divine power must always bear a moral aspect; and it is their character in this respect that must enhance the value of every intimation of His love, and aggravate the bitterness of every manifestation of His wrath, beyond what it is possible to estimate or express. And so it must obviously have been with the great adversary of truth and righteousness under the defeat which he sustained in his conflict with the Saviour of

sinners. That defeat was not the mere endurance of punishment inflicted upon him by a power which he was unable to resist. Whatever punishment might have been awarded to him by the exercise of mere power, still if the evil of his artifice had been left unrepaired, and mankind had been permitted to perish, there might have been some cause of triumph to the spirit of malignity and mischief. But to find himself baffled in the conflict, which was to terminate in the redemption of the world which he had ruined,—to be met and resisted not merely by the energy of a power superior to his own, but by the strength of moral excellence sustaining the last desperate efforts of his most horrible temptations,—to be overpowered by the manifestations of all that was pure, and elevated, and good, in the person of Him whom he sought to seduce or terrify into sin, —to be overwhelmed with the consciousness of his own degradation and baseness, when contrasted with the moral grandeur of the object of his enmity,—to feel that all his devices and assaults served only to exhibit a brighter and more glorious display of the loveliness which he hated,—and to see that man might not only be saved in perfect consistency with the divine rectitude and veracity, but that all the moral attributes of the Godhead were glorified in the manner of his salvation,—this must have been to the great enemy of all righteousness a discomfiture the most overwhelming, and an infliction of wrath the most terrible, which it was possible for him to sustain ; and thus, we cannot doubt, there was in the very manner of his defeat the fiercest pang of that anguish which has been assigned to him as his portion,—even of the worm that dieth not, and of the fire that is not quenched.

But there is one point of view in which the way of man's recovery stands strikingly contrasted with the manner of his fall. We have already seen that man fell from his state of holy blessedness by the belief of a lie, framed and asserted by him who is emphatically denominated "the father of lies;" and it is peculiarly worthy of notice, that the way in which man is again reinstated in the possession of that blessedness is by the belief of the truth.

God has testified in his Word concerning Jesus Christ, that he has finished the work which was given him to do,—that as Me-

diator between God and sinners he has made peace by the blood of his cross,—that peace and reconciliation have accordingly been proclaimed to the guilty in his name,—and that whosoever believeth on him shall not perish, but shall have everlasting life. And if such be the principle on which God extends pardon to the guilty; if Christ undertook and has actually accomplished the work of reconciliation, so as to leave nothing in the way of satisfaction to be made on the part of sinners; and if salvation be really tendered to them in the Gospel as the free gift of God through Jesus Christ, then there is enough in the very nature of the thing to explain why it is that the sinner's personal interest in that salvation is suspended, so to speak, on his faith in the divine testimony concerning Christ, inasmuch as it is only when truth is believed that it can exercise over man's moral nature that influence which the Gospel is designed to exercise. We find, accordingly, that the operation of the Spirit, whose work it is to regenerate the heart, is represented in Scripture as consisting in his opening the eyes to see, and the heart to love the truth; that the considerations by which sinners are conscious of being influenced and affected are the representations which the Scriptures give of the wrath of God on the one hand, and of his love and compassion on the other; that right apprehensions of these, awakened by the enlightening influence of the Holy Ghost, will never fail to be accompanied by a hatred of sin, and turning from it unto God; and that thus faith purifieth the heart, worketh by love, and overcometh the world.

But the wisdom and rectitude of the divine ordination whereby eternal life is inseparably connected with the belief of the truth, are rendered still more obvious and palpable by the consideration that eternal death was incurred by the belief of a lie; for what can be conceived more decisive of character, or what can more distinctly mark the contrast between two individuals with respect to spiritual condition, than to say of the one that he believes the truth of God, and of the other that he believes the lie of the devil? And is not the latter really the condition of all who have not cordially embraced the proposals of the Gospel? With respect to those who avowedly deny the truth of Divine Revelation, the remark is too obviously applicable to them to require any illustration; and it is hardly less obvious in the case

of those who, though not professedly unbelievers, do nevertheless surrender themselves to sinful gratifications, with some kind of vague hope that they may nevertheless escape the punishment of sin at last. Both classes are really believing the very falsehood by which our first parents were deceived,—"Ye shall not surely die."

But I fear the remark is applicable to many more, whose character and condition may appear to be far more hopeful. For why is it that so many treat the Gospel with an indifference which they neither feel nor manifest about any worldly object of the least value? Why is it that they rest contented with acknowledging its truths as mere matters of opinion, while they are utter strangers to the constraining influence of the love of Christ? How does it happen that they can read and hear statements of the most tremendous import to them, as creatures destined for an eternal state of existence, and these, too, professedly as the true sayings of God, when the next moment they are dismissed and forgotten for the sake of the veriest trifle that may happen to solicit their attention? And why is it that the testimony of God concerning Christ, instead of being eagerly listened to as good tidings of great joy to the guilty, is felt by many to be a very uninteresting, at least, if not an offensive subject? Of these questions it is impossible to give any other rational solution than, what I fear is the true one, that such persons do not seriously believe what they profess; and if such be their state, then what can be said of them but that they are believing the suggestions of the tempter? He deceived our first parents by persuading them, in opposition to the solemn declaration of God, that though they disobeyed, they should not surely die; and he seeks to deceive their posterity by persuading them, now that they have fallen into a state of sin and death, that their condition is not so dangerous and never can be so desperate as the Bible represents. The lie is somewhat modified in its form, but in both cases it is essentially the same in its nature, and must be equally fatal in its consequences.

Nor is this the only device whereby he contrives to deceive sinners. When they have been so far awakened to an apprehension of danger as to be unable any longer to stifle their convictions and to suppress their fears, and when they begin eagerly

to cast about for a resting-place to their disquieted spirits, he not unfrequently endeavours to convince them that their case is desperate,—that they are beyond the reach of that mercy which they have so often slighted and so long abused,—and that there remains nothing for them but the incurable anguish of a wounded spirit,—the intolerable agony of despair. This is also a lie,—not less dishonouring to God or less ruinous to the souls of men than the other. I do not mean by this remark to assert that I would be warranted to say of any individual in such a state that he will assuredly be saved; but neither is such an individual warranted to say that he shall certainly be lost. In the face of God's testimony concerning his Son, where all are invited to come and take of the waters of life freely, such a declaration on the part of any man concerning himself is in reality nothing less than an impious determination not to acquiesce in the proposals of divine grace; and while it involves in it all the guilt of rejecting these proposals, there is at the foundation of it the belief of Satan's suggestion, that the sinner's guilt is beyond the efficacy of the Saviour's blood, in opposition to the express declaration of God, that this blood cleanses from all sin. How unsearchable, then, the riches of that wisdom which devised the scheme of our redemption, and has presented in the cross of Christ an overwhelming refutation of the two great falsehoods whereby the tempter would deceive sinners to their ruin, exhibiting, on the one hand, a rectitude and holiness which can pass by no sin unexpiated or unpunished, and revealing, on the other, the grace and mercy that can freely pardon the guiltiest! And how emphatically true is it that we are delivered from the snare of the devil, and chosen unto salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth!

IV.

INSTITUTION OF SACRIFICE, AND EXPULSION FROM EDEN.

GENESIS III. 21–24.

In former expositions, I directed attention to the preceding chapters of this book. The information there given of the original constitution of man, and the circumstances in which he was placed, is very concise. Yet we have seen that it contains enough to show how full and rich was the provision made for rendering man happy,—especially in his being admitted to free and frequent converse with God, the author of his being, the fountain of life and blessedness, the bountiful Creator, who had not only called him into a state of blessedness, but had pledged his truth and faithfulness to make that happiness perpetual. This short but most comprehensive account is followed by a narrative, equally simple and concise, of the way in which man forfeited the promise of life, and incurred the sentence of death. The history is given in the fewest possible words,—at the same time the plainest and most intelligible. It makes no provision for vindicating the divine procedure in the transaction from the ten thousand cavils which men have since ventured to start against it. With the divine simplicity befitting the righteous Lawgiver and Judge, it records the trial and the fall of man ; and proceeds to state, with equal simplicity, the melancholy consequences of that fall. It sets forth in a single sentence, with a power to which the most lengthened description could add nothing, the lamentable change which took place in Adam's

mind, when, from being the abode of peace and comfort and a feeling of security, it became a prey to suspicion and fear, agitated by a tumult of passions which plainly showed that his happiness was at end,—even a feeling of dread towards God, with whom he had so often before been honoured to hold converse, and a wish to throw upon his companion in sin and misery all the blame of that guilty deed which had made him miserable. It is evident, from the whole tenor of the second chapter, that, amidst all the luxuriance and loveliness which the skill and beneficence of the Creator had thrown around him in the paradise prepared for his abode, his highest and purest happiness must have been derived from immediate fellowship with the Author of his being, and the Source of all his mercies; and that the intimation of the divine presence, in whatever way that intimation was made to him, must on every occasion have filled his soul with joy and gladness. How melancholy, then, and full of meaning is the statement, "And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day; and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden."

We cannot adequately conceive of the terror and dismay which at that moment must have overwhelmed our guilty parents, when, helpless and without hope, they vainly attempted to conceal themselves from the all-seeing eye, and to escape from the judgment of Him, in whose favour and fellowship they were wont formerly to take delight; for we have never known, as they did, what it is to have fallen from a state of pure and holy blessedness. But we can form some idea of the dread and suspicion which then took possession of their minds; for, as the effect of conscious guilt, such a state of mind is a matter of bitter experience to all whose consciences have not been pacified by the faith of the Gospel,—unless, indeed, they have contrived to make their escape from every thing like a vivid apprehension of God as their present witness and their future judge. And such is the refuge to which men are naturally disposed to betake themselves. They do not like to retain God in their knowledge. They have a secret aversion to solemn and serious thoughts of His presence, and cannot conceive of any pleasure or satisfaction being found in real and intimate communion with Him. They are naturally

alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that is in them; and until their guilty suspicions are dissipated by the hope of God's forgiving mercy, and their heart and affections won by the manifestation of his love in Christ Jesus, they act on the same principle that Adam and Eve did, when "they hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden."

Such was the immediate effect of man's transgression in respect to the state of his mind and feeling towards God; and there is a plain intimation, I think, that the effect, as it regarded his sentiments towards his fellow-creatures, was not less melancholy. The selfishness which is so peculiarly characteristic of our fallen nature, and which prompts men to pursue their own interests at the expense of their neighbour's, seems to have taken possession of Adam's mind the moment he disobeyed the divine commandment; for when the question was put to him, "Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?" how readily did he seek, if not to justify, at least to palliate his offence, by throwing the blame on his unhappy companion in sin, not without something like a reflection on the wisdom and goodness of God in having given him such a companion,—"The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat." The reflecting reader will find in these very short notices of how Adam felt towards God and towards his fellow-creature, a very comprehensive representation of the change wrought on man's moral nature by the fall, as that change has been more fully unfolded in Scripture and in man's own experience; and brief as the account is, it will furnish to every devout mind abundant matter for profitable reflection.

With regard to the effects of the fall, as following on the righteous sentence of God in the way of positive infliction, the narrative is equally concise. It goes on to tell that judgment was passed on all the parties concerned in the transaction, and that to none of them was any thing said to hold out the hope of a remission or mitigation of the sentence pronounced on them. Not only was the serpent, through which the tempter exercised his subtlety in seducing our first parents, doomed to be, by its very form and habits, a perpetual memorial of God's righteous

judgment, but the tempter himself was by that sentence consigned to defeat and disgrace,—to a punishment befitting the Judge of all to pass in vindication of his insulted majesty and truth. And to our first parents were awarded manifold sorrows and sufferings. For man's sake the ground was cursed,—that ground out of which the Lord God had made to grow every tree yielding fruit, and every herb, and which he had pronounced to be very good. In sorrow he was doomed to eat of it all the days of his life. In the sweat of his face he was to eat bread, till he should return unto the ground: for the irreversible sentence went forth, "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." And, in like manner, in the passage under consideration, we find nothing but the execution of the sentence recorded in the preceding context, even the expulsion of man from the garden of Eden,—a very plain and solemn intimation that he had banished himself from the divine favour and presence, and had incurred the displeasure of Him in whom he lived, and moved, and had his being. But to render this intimation the more intelligible and impressive,—to show him how entirely and how hopelessly, so far as it depended on himself, he had forfeited life,—he was especially cut off from all access to that tree which had been planted in the midst of the garden, for the very purpose of being a pledge of life to him so long as he preserved his innocence; and a supernatural guard was placed upon it, to forbid even an attempt to take and to eat of it: "The Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken. So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life."

But though in all this there was judgment, and nothing but judgment,—no hope being held out to any of the parties, in the declarations made to them respectively, of any reversal or mitigation of their sentence; yet our first parents were not left in a state of utter hopelessness,—abandoned to all the anguish of despair. In the course of the narrative, two remarkable circumstances occur, which, without in any degree altering or mitigating the judgment whereby man was doomed to toil and sore travail, even in his best days, and at last to disease, decay, and death, did nevertheless hold out to him the hope of ultimately

being delivered from all the evil which by his transgression he had entailed on himself and his posterity. The first of these circumstances is the remarkable language addressed to the serpent, wherein there is not only a direct sentence dooming the creature to degradation, but a special reference to the woman, the first victim of the tempter's subtlety, plainly declaring that by her means the most fearful part of the divine judgment on the serpent was to be executed,—"Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life: and I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." The prominent place in this remarkable declaration assigned to the woman in the execution of God's judgment on the serpent, and the very peculiar language which was employed to describe the manner of that execution, must have conveyed to our first parents such comfort and hope as could not fail to raise from their minds a load of anxiety and terror which would otherwise have overwhelmed them in utter despair. But for this hope, I cannot conceive that they could have survived their fall a single day. There is, however, another circumstance stated in the verses before us, which, as I understand it, must have gone to strengthen very largely the hope which rested on the first intimation of a Saviour. I refer to the verse in which it is said, "Unto Adam also and to his wife did the Lord God make coats of skins, and clothed them." On the numerous and lengthened discussions to which this remarkable passage has given rise, we do not think it either desirable or necessary to enter. Taken with what follows in the immediately succeeding chapter, a simple-minded reader,—and for such the Bible was written,—would naturally conclude, we think, that the animals with whose skins our first parents were clothed must have been slain in sacrifice. They could not be slain for food, at least with the divine sanction, for permission to do so was not given for many hundreds of years after that period; and for no conceivable purpose could man voluntarily put animals to death, unless it had been to allay the cravings of hunger.

For a long time, indeed, after the fall, we could imagine

nothing more painful for man to witness than death in any case and in any form,—being that which brought most vividly before him the terrible sentence which had just been passed upon himself. It is, moreover, especially worthy of remark, that in the account given of Abel's offering in the following chapter, it is spoken of, not as a new institution, but as a thing that had already been observed at stated periods; while the difference between the offerings of the two brothers is evidently made to depend on the one being a bloody sacrifice, and the other not. The natural conclusion, therefore, is, that almost immediately after the fall, Adam was instructed to offer animals in sacrifice to God, and that through these sacrifices, as types of the great Atonement which was afterwards made, he might have received the forgiveness of sin, and have been restored again to the divine favour. We cannot pretend to determine to what extent Adam understood the great Sacrifice thus prefigured; though we can easily conceive that, viewing the ordinance of sacrifice in connection with the sentence passed on the serpent,—the seed of the woman "shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel,"—he might have gathered from it that the promised Deliverer, the mysterious Person who was to destroy the power and defeat the devices of the tempter, and so to undo what had been done to bring man into a state of guilt and misery, was Himself to suffer and to die in the conflict. But whatever might be the amount of his knowledge on the subject, if he was commanded to offer sacrifice, and if he obeyed the command in the exercise of faith in the divine revelation, so far as that had been vouchsafed to him, there must have been some outward and sensible intimation of the acceptance of his offering. It was plainly so in the case of Abel, related in the following chapter; and we have no reason to doubt that it was so likewise in the case of Adam.

Our first parents, then, were not given up to despair. Though there was no mitigation of the sentence pronounced upon them, and no direct intimation of ultimate deliverance from that death which is the wages of sin,—even eternal exclusion from the presence and the favour of God,—yet there was an indirect promise of a Saviour vouchsafed to him, and there was an ordinance in which that Saviour was plainly typified or prefigured; so that, even

in the garden of Eden, and before man was cast upon that wide world, which, through his apostacy, had become comparatively a waste howling wilderness, the Gospel was preached to him,—even salvation by the blood of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

But though enough was thus revealed to man of God's gracious purposes to preserve him from despair, and, if he believed it, to awaken the good hope of pardon and acceptance with God; yet, in respect to all the sorrows and sufferings of this present life, to which his transgressions had subjected him, there was no reversal or mitigation of the sentence. He had forfeited all the comforts which had been so abundantly provided for him in the garden of Eden; and, having lost his innocence, he could no longer be an inmate in that abode which was fitted only for the innocent. He was accordingly sent forth, or, as it is afterwards expressed, he was driven from the garden of Eden; and the reason assigned for this exclusion is expressed in very remarkable words,—"And the Lord God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever: therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken."

I do not venture to inquire what the effect would have been had man after the fall been permitted to take of the tree of life. Perhaps there would be a vast impropriety in making any supposition on the subject. But the language employed does very emphatically express the miserable disappointment which man experienced in the hopes which he cherished, and by which he was induced to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It will be remembered that one part of the tempter's representation to Eve was, that by eating of the forbidden fruit they should be as gods, knowing good and evil; and it was in the form of pride, therefore, that sin first gained admission into the human heart. And, having gained admission, it was not to be humbled, far less expelled, by the bitter disappointment which followed,—as the whole history of our fallen race abundantly testifies. Our first parents might be, and indeed could not fail to be, for a time overwhelmed with the dread of the divine displeasure, especially while they were in a state of doubt

and uncertainty as to the nature and extent of the punishment to which they had rendered themselves obnoxious. But no sooner would this terror be removed, than pride would assuredly resume its sway; and, like their posterity in all subsequent times, they would be prone to delude themselves with the idea, that they might by something of their own,—some measure of conformity to the divine law,—lay claim to acceptance with God. And, had they been permitted to remain within sight and within reach of the tree of life, they might, they would assuredly have thought, that, by eating of that pledge (that sacramental sign and seal of life), they might yet live for ever. It was both a sign and a seal of the promise of eternal life to them while in a state of innocence; and it would have continued to be so had they continued innocent. But, having become guilty and obnoxious to punishment, they had no right to regard it in that light. Their only ground of hope, from the hour that God called them from their hiding-place, and pronounced in their hearing the awful sentence on the tempter, was the promise of a Saviour, confirmed and ratified by the institution of sacrifice; and any other refuge or foundation of hope to which they might betake themselves, would only have gone to strengthen the delusion whereby they were drawn into apostacy, when they fancied that by eating the forbidden fruit they would be as gods, knowing good and evil.

It was in great mercy, therefore, that they were shut out from all access to the tree of life; and in the reason given for their being so excluded from it, there is the language both of pity and rebuke. "Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil," is a strong expression of pity, at the same time intended to humble them; as if the question had been put to them which was put to Judah at a subsequent period,—"Where are thy gods that thou hast made thee? Let them arise, if they can save thee in the time of thy trouble." But having once been deluded and become corrupt, they would have continued subject to still stronger delusion; so that, instead of humbly accepting and confiding in the promised Saviour, and looking for eternal life as the free gift of God, pardoning and accepting them through an atonement, they would have cherished the presumptuous hope, that by taking of the tree of life they would

thereby have been entitled to that life of which it was the sign and seal.

So it has been with the posterity of Adam in all ages; for, simple as the Gospel is, and plain as are its proposals, nothing is more contrary to men's natural disposition than to look for acceptance with God and eternal life simply and exclusively as the result of Christ's atoning sacrifice. In one form or another, self-righteousness is the ground on which multitudes rest their hopes for eternity, imagining that their character and conduct are such as warrant them to hope that they will be accepted. All, in fact, are naturally prone to seek justification by the works of the law, and are virtually attempting, on the strength of their own righteousness, to take and eat of the tree of life, and to live for ever. It was, therefore, a most gracious and merciful procedure on the part of God to drive our first parents from the garden of Eden,—to place them beyond the reach and even the sight of the tree of life,—that they might thereby feel how hopeless and how helpless their condition was except for the promise of the Saviour,—that they might be shut up to a simple reliance on Him, as the only way of recovering the life which they had forfeited;—and that, from the sad experience of the bitter fruits of their transgression, they might feel how precious was the promise, "The seed of the woman shall bruise the head of the serpent."

This, however, was not the whole of what took place on the memorable occasion here referred to. Man was driven from Eden to till the ground from whence he was taken, and in sorrow to eat of it all the days of his life; and inconceivably sad must the contrast have been to him between that happy spot, out of which "the Lord God had made to grow every tree that was pleasant to the sight and good for food," and the blighted and withered ground which had been cursed with comparative barrenness, which was to bring forth thorns and thistles to him, and out of which he was "to eat bread in the sweat of his face." But, in addition to all this, supernatural means were employed to prevent him from even attempting to return to his once happy abode. "At the east of the garden of Eden the Lord God placed cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life." To Adam this must have

been a very plain intimation that it was utterly impossible for him to obtain life on the condition on which it had once been promised and sealed to him. But to us, who have seen the whole counsel of God concerning sinners unfolded, it speaks still more plainly; and it emphatically tells us, that before man could take of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever, the justice of God required to be satisfied, the honour of his law vindicated, and sin visited with such a punishment as it was befitting the holy and righteous Judge of all to inflict. The flaming sword was to be encountered before any one could reach the tree of life. But it has been so encountered,—it has done its work of judgment,—it kept the way to the tree of life, till He came of whom it was said, "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of hosts." That sword was not turned aside to make way for His approach to the tree of life. He presented himself before it as the substitute and representative of sinners, to be dealt with as it was befitting God to deal with the guilty; and it executed against Him all that it was commissioned to execute. But He reached the tree of life notwithstanding. The flaming sword is now withdrawn,—the way to that tree is laid open,—all are invited to draw near, and take thereof, and eat, and live for ever. And while the humble and contrite in heart,—they who are willing to take of this fruit as a free gift, procured for and brought to them by the Saviour at the expense of his own blood,—do even now, in this present state, experience the quickening and life-giving virtue of that tree, they have the prospect of partaking still more largely of it hereafter, for, "in the midst of the street of the new Jerusalem, and on either side of the river, is the tree of life, which bears twelve manner of fruits, and yieldeth her fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations." Have we, then, by a simple reliance on the Saviour, and a cordial acceptance of his proposals, tasted of this tree of life? To eat of that tree, so as to live for ever, is, without a figure, to believe on Christ; for whosoever cometh unto him shall never hunger, and whosoever believeth on him shall never thirst. They are filled with joy and peace in believing.

V.

SACRIFICES OF CAIN AND ABEL.

GENESIS IV. 1-8.

We are now entering upon the history of man as a fallen creature, and on the record of God's dealings with him in that character. We have, indeed, already seen how it was that he fell, and what the judgment was which God passed upon him in consequence of his fall; and we have also considered the concise but very comprehensive intimation which was given him of God's gracious plan, whereby to recover him from the state of sin and misery into which he had fallen. It is not, therefore, in the verses now under consideration, that man is for the first time presented to us as a sinner, or that we find the first announcement of a way by which a sinner may be accepted with God. All this we find even within the comparatively small portion of the Divine Record which we have already examined. But it is here that we find him entering on a state of which we can form a clear and distinct conception, being the state in the ills of which every individual of his posterity has in some measure participated. Down to the close of the preceding chapter, and even subsequently to his fall, there was still something in his condition and circumstances that was peculiar to himself,—something of which none of his posterity could ever have any experience. Though he was guilty, as they have all been, and though he had felt a deeper, a more overwhelming, a more hopeless sense of that guilt than perhaps he experienced at any future

period, yet he was still in that place which had originally been fitted and prepared for him as the abode of innocence and peace: and though he must have looked forward to expulsion from that abode as near at hand, and had been warned of the sore travail that awaited him as an outcast and a wanderer, yet it was only after he had been so expelled that he knew otherwise than by anticipation what his condition was to be. With this chapter, then, commences the history of our fallen race, as we know it from experience and observation to be,—a history which, from the moment here referred to, discloses, in an endless variety of ways, the corruption and depravity of the human heart, as the fruitful source of all those crimes and sufferings which stain its pages;—but a history, also, which unfolds the marvellous forbearance, compassion, and long-suffering patience of God, all terminating in the appearing of Him who from the beginning was foretold as the seed of the woman who was to bruise the head of the serpent, and was typified as the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world.

Here, then, we enter on the record of the bitter consequences of man's apostacy, as these appear in the sins and sufferings of our race,—through every successive generation till the present hour,—and we meet, at the very commencement, with a most appalling, but not a solitary example of the desperate depravity of human nature. The history begins with announcing the birth of the eldest children of our first parents; and, as might be expected, proceeds immediately to tell us what these children proved to be when they arrived at the years of understanding. With regard to the manner in which their births are announced, it has been supposed, and I think on good grounds, that Eve entertained some vague hope that the promise of the Saviour was to be fulfilled in the person of her first-born son, Cain. This supposition seems to be countenanced both by the name Cain, which signifies possession, something gotten or acquired, and by the language which Eve employed, whereby she plainly intimated that she attached great importance to his birth. It has been thought, moreover, that a farther confirmation of this idea is to be found in the name given to her second son, Abel, which signifies vanity, as if his birth was a matter of little moment compared with that of his elder brother. And if she

did entertain any such hope regarding Cain, how miserably was she disappointed! The disappointment had been sufficiently bitter, even though Cain had proved to be all that Abel was; for that would have fallen very far short of what her expectations must have been, if she entertained the hope of seeing in him the fulfilment of the sentence passed on the serpent. But how unspeakably aggravated must that disappointment have been by what she was destined to witness! She had heard of death, and she knew that by an irreversible sentence she herself was doomed to die; but to see that awful, and, to her, mysterious infliction first exhibited in the person of her younger son, and that too by the hand of another son, even of one concerning whom she had entertained and cherished such exalted hopes, must have agonised her maternal feelings beyond any thing that we can conceive. It is true, though she was the first, she has not been the only or the last mother whose hopes regarding a beloved child have been withered and blasted; but it is to be hoped that the cases are comparatively few in which a parent has had to witness the melancholy spectacle of one child falling a victim to the enmity and malignant passion of another;—and as the first example of that awful charge so emphatically expressed in the solemn threatening, "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return," the trial which Eve endured is without a parallel in the history of her posterity. Her first-born son, of whom she hoped that he was to bruise the serpent's head, and in some way, of which, perhaps, she did not distinctly conceive, was to counteract or undo the mischief which the tempter's subtlety had wrought, proved to be of the serpent's seed,—and in the murder of his brother furnished a most appalling illustration of the sentence pronounced in her hearing, when "the Lord God said unto the serpent, I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed."

It was plainly intimated in this declaration, what is everywhere else taught in Scripture, and confirmed by experience, that mankind should be found to consist of two classes,—the children of light, and the children of darkness. And how early, as well as fearfully, was this exemplified in the first-born of our fallen race. It is expressly said of Cain by an inspired apostle, that "he was of that wicked one;" while of Abel it is said by

another apostle, that "he obtained witness," even the testimony of God himself, "that he was righteous." The cause, too, of that enmity, which it was foretold was to subsist between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman, is very clearly unfolded in the conduct of Cain towards his brother. But if there were any doubt, it has been removed by the express declaration of Scripture; for while the apostle says of Cain, "He was of that wicked one, and slew his brother," he immediately puts the question, "And wherefore slew he him?" "Because," he replies, "his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous." And so it has ever since been. The enmity of ungodly men against the children of the light has not always been permitted to proceed to such a desperate extremity as did Cain's,—for many are the restraints which have been laid even on the worst passions of human nature; but that the enmity exemplified in the character and conduct of Cain has in all ages existed in the hearts of unregenerate men against the truth, and against those who have embraced and lived under the influence of that truth, is abundantly evident from the whole history of our race. It is that, moreover, which the Scriptures have very unequivocally taught believers to expect. In the passage already quoted, where the apostle assigns as the reason of Cain's hatred of his brother, "that his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous," he immediately adds, as a plain inference from this, "Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you." And in thus distinctly intimating that they might lay their account with experiencing, in one form or another, and to such an extent as God might see meet to permit, the same kind of enmity as Cain manifested against his righteous brother, the apostle is only repeating what he had himself heard from the lips of his divine Master:—"If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you."

The narrative before us, having related the birth of Cain and Abel, proceeds, without saying any thing of their character and conduct in youth, to tell us what occupations they betook themselves to in riper years. "Abel," it is said, "was a keeper of

sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground." I need hardly remark, that any thing like a minute history of these individuals, or a detail of the circumstances and events by which we cannot doubt their respective characters would be gradually unfolded, was not to be expected,—nay, that it would have been inconsistent with the necessary brevity of the Divine Record. Nor was such a detail at all required to bring out the contrast between the two brothers. That has been placed in the most striking light that can be conceived by the account of a single transaction, and its immediate consequences. "In process of time," we are told, or, as it is rendered on the margin, "at the end of days,"—some stated period,—"Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering: but unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect." We are naturally led, I think, to infer from this narrative, that the immediate ground of the acceptance of Abel's offering, and the rejection of Cain's, was the difference between the offerings themselves. In Abel's there was the shedding of blood, the infliction of death. In Cain's there was not. That Abel should have ventured to put any of God's creatures to death without a divine warrant appears to me in the last degree improbable. That animal sacrifice should from the beginning have been a divinely-instituted ordinance is not only probable, but is the only supposition, I think, which is consistent with the prominent place which we find it occupying throughout the whole of the Old Testament dispensation, and the many special rules which were prescribed for the regulation of the same under the Mosaical economy. It was not with these rules that animal sacrifice originated, for here we find that it was practised by Abel. Noah also proceeded, immediately on leaving the ark, to build an altar, and to offer up every clean beast unto the Lord. Such, also, was the practice of Abraham, and of all the saints of subsequent times. But that animal sacrifice was of divine appointment, intended to hold up to the faith and hope of the Church the great atoning sacrifice of Christ, is placed, I think, beyond all doubt by the declaration of the apostle. He tells us that "by faith Abel offered a more excellent sacrifice than Cain."

There must, therefore, have been some revelation from God on the subject of sacrifice: for, as faith means the belief of God's Word, it is plain that if there had been no revelation on the part of God, there could have been no faith on the part of Abel;—in other words, if God had communicated nothing on the subject of sacrifice, Abel could have had nothing to believe. And if any thing was prescribed, as it appears from the preceding chapters to have been, to Adam, it must have been the offering of animal sacrifice,—the shedding of blood, without which, through the whole of the Mosaical economy, there was no remission. And if so, then the immediate cause of the rejection of Cain's offering, was his refusing to approach God in the prescribed manner, whereby he virtually declared that he stood in no need of any such expiation as the shedding of blood implied, and that he would offer no such expiation. And in perfect accordance with this view of the subject, is the whole tenor of the narrative before us. "Cain," we are told, "was very wroth, and his countenance fell. And the Lord said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted?" or, as in the margin, "shalt thou not have the excellency?" that is, above thy brother, as being the first-born; "and if thou doest not well, sin" (or a sin-offering) "lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his" (thy brother's) "desire," or, as in the margin again, "he shall be subject unto thee, and thou shalt rule over him."

Such, as it appears to me, is the only way in which the meaning of the passage before us can be placed in a clear and simple point of view. And, in the sense in which we have now understood it, it agrees with the whole tenor of Scripture regarding the importance everywhere attached to animal sacrifice, and the remarkable prominency which is given to it among the divine ordinances. It was thus that God provided, from the beginning, for preserving among men, in a way the most impressive that can be conceived, the knowledge and the remembrance of the great principle that sin deserves death, and that if the sinner be forgiven, it is because his guilt is transferred to a substitute who should die in his room. And by the same ordinance God did also provide for preserving the knowledge of the great promise that such a substitute should one day appear, and take

away sin by the sacrifice of himself, even "the seed of the woman that was to bruise the serpent's head." And it was thus, too, that the Covenant of Grace was not only obscurely hinted at in the curse pronounced upon the serpent, but embodied and set forth in a positive and palpable institution,—an institution which continued through all future ages, till the coming of Christ, to be the clearest and most significant of all the exhibitions that were given of the great principle of that covenant,—and one which was made available, not only for the salvation of the first man that died, but for rendering him a pattern of faith in a Redeemer to the whole human race: for it is testified of Abel, that by his sacrifice, "he being dead, yet speaketh."

And such being the ordination of God, it was, even to our apprehension, limited though our knowledge of the plans and purposes of God must be, a most befitting thing, that an attempt to approach him, and to lay claim to his approbation by the first-born of our guilty parents, in such a way as to set his ordination at defiance, should be visited with a special mark of his righteous displeasure. But it was not merely befitting as a vindication of the divine authority, and the rectitude of the divine administration. Though a visitation of wrath on the guilty, proud, and self-righteous individual, it was also a gracious and merciful warning to all who might come after him, that there was only one way of approach to God,—the way of atonement,—and that any attempt to draw near by another medium could only end in misery and ruin. On this ground alone, therefore, we see a satisfactory explanation of the fact, that while "unto Abel and to his offering the Lord had respect, unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect." Cain openly renounced all dependence on a Mediator,—ventured to approach God on the strength of his own righteousness,—and looked for acceptance on the ground of a mere act of homage, as if he had no guilt to be washed away, no sin to be forgiven.

Nor let it be supposed that I am thus putting the acceptance of Abel, and the rejection of Cain, on the mere external acts which they respectively performed. It is plain that, previously to their bringing their respective offerings, their characters were as different as their offerings were, and that the mode of presenting these offerings was but the occasion of bringing out their charac-

ters as they really were. We cannot doubt that both Cain and Abel were familiar with their father's history,—that he had often told them what he had once been, and what by disobedience he had become; nor could he fail to relate to them all that God had said to himself in the way both of judgment and of mercy. And, assuming that he had done so, Abel's character turned out all that, by the blessing of God, a docile and dutiful child might be expected to become under the instruction of a father whose great concern was, that his children might be led into the right way,—the way of peace and happiness. On the other hand, Cain was an example of that proud and wayward spirit,—alas, not a rare one!—on which the wisest and the most judicious parental instruction seems entirely thrown away,—one who, though he might for a time feel and acknowledge the moral restraints which were laid upon him by the example, and the warnings, and the instructions of a father, became in time too wise in his own conceit to submit to these, and felt at the moment that he first threw them off as if he had attained to liberty,—the miserable liberty of ruining himself for ever.

How soon these different dispositions in the two brothers began to manifest themselves we cannot determine, seeing the record is silent on the subject. But we all know enough of human nature, and we have all seen examples enough of such differences among children, to be convinced that in youth at least, if not even in childhood, there might have been a very unequivocal distinction between the characters of Cain and Abel. One thing is very plain, that Cain must for a considerable time have cast off his regard for the authority of God, both as to the threatenings and the promises which had been made to his father: for it could only be after a lengthened period of such practical infidelity that he could have ventured to set at nought the one only way of approaching God which had been announced by his parents, and which he saw practised by his humble, devout, and believing brother. And all this is fully confirmed, I think, by the subsequent part of the narrative. "The Lord," we are told, "had respect unto Abel and to his offering: but unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect;" whereupon it is said that "Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell." This acceptance of Abel's offering must obviously have been very

distinct and unequivocal, such as to leave no room for doubt, even in the dark and gloomy mind of Cain himself, that his offering was rejected. Perhaps God was pleased, as he was wont in subsequent times, to consume Abel's sacrifice by fire from heaven, as a token of his acceptance both of the offering and the person of the offerer. But in whatever way that acceptance was indicated, instead of humbling Cain, and leading him in penitence and faith to seek pardon and acceptance with God, it served only to awaken into more active energy the malignant enmity of his mind against God, and against him who bore God's image,—a very plain proof that his heart had already been hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. "He was very wroth!" With whom? With God, in the first instance,—thereby, with desperate hardihood, defying the very power and vengeance of Jehovah himself; and with Abel next, his unoffending brother, because God testified of his gifts, and declared him to be righteous.

And what was the immediate cause of all this anger and disappointment? Was it the loss of God's favour? No; it was mainly the loss of a worldly object,—his privileges and honours as the first-born of his father; for it is evident from the remonstrances which God vouchsafed to address to him, first, that even from the beginning there was, by divine authority, some distinction attached to the first-born son,—a distinction recognised everywhere throughout the Scriptures; and, secondly, that Cain by his disobedience had forfeited this privilege. His principal forfeiture undoubtedly was, that he was not to be the father of that line in which was to appear, in the fulness of time, the promised Deliverer, the seed of the woman who was to bruise the head of the serpent. On the contrary, he was himself of that wicked one; and, notwithstanding the solemn reproof which he received, and the gracious remonstrance which was addressed to him, his malignity and hatred towards the true seed, the holy and humble Abel, gathered strength, till at last it broke out in the deliberate murder of his unoffending brother. "And Cain talked with Abel his brother: and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him."

Few, perhaps none, can have read this simple, but very

appalling narrative, without some sensation of horror at the thought, that, of the first two children that were born into this world, the one should have imbrued his hands in the other's blood: for with all the corruption of human nature, there is something very revolting in the actual crime of murder. Thanks be to God that he has placed in every human heart a conscience, which, amidst the tumult and the turmoil of unholy passions, is strong enough generally to prevent these passions breaking loose, so as to manifest themselves in the more heinous and aggravated crimes which are sometimes perpetrated! But the guilt of such crimes is not confined to the actual perpetration of them. In the sight of Him who searches the heart, and who knows the thoughts afar off, there may be a nearer approach to these sins than men would be willing to believe or acknowledge, though they stop short of committing them. It was, no doubt, a very daring defiance of the justice of God, on the part of Cain, when he presumed to offer of the fruits of the ground, in contempt of the ordinance of animal sacrifice, through which alone he could be accepted. But, after all, his sin, considered essentially, is a very common one. He, no doubt, began by alleging that his method of acknowledging his dependence on God was more rational than that which his father had taught him, and which his brother practised. But have we not in the history of men in every age, and at the present day, as much as at any former period, examples in abundance of the very same principle,—multitudes who are in reality looking for acceptance with God, and acquittal at his judgment-seat hereafter,—if, indeed, there be an hereafter, of which, it is to be feared, they have no settled convictions,—while they could not tell, if interrogated, what portion of their hope rests on the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ? They, too, like Cain, think their system a far more rational one than that which is founded on an atonement,—on the shedding of blood as the only way of remission; and if they do not absent themselves altogether from religious ordinances, as many of them do, and as others show a strong inclination to do, they attend because it is a decent fashion, and because all ordinances, in their estimation, are alike irrational and useless. And then, with regard to Cain's crime in shedding his brother's blood, men may to a very large extent be chargeable with the guilt of that crime,

though they might shrink with horror from the very thought of perpetrating it.

We cannot suppose,—it were altogether inconsistent with every thing that Scripture and experience have taught us of human nature to suppose,—that Cain did all at once form his murderous design against Abel. The narrative itself plainly intimates that it was a deed coolly considered, and cautiously gone about. "He talked with Abel his brother: and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that he rose up against his brother, and slew him." This is just the account of almost every murder of which we are from time to time hearing; and no man who is at all acquainted with human nature can doubt, that when Cain first felt dislike and enmity towards Abel, he no more dreamed of imbruing his hands in his blood, than any one who has given way for a moment to a feeling of anger and irritation towards a friend. But he cherished his anger. With his growing dislike to the truth, and to the God of truth, his dislike to Abel, in whose character the power of that truth was manifested, gathered strength. He envied his brother for the enjoyment of that peace to which his own bosom was a stranger. With an infatuation which some may think unaccountable, but which every observing man must see to be by no means uncommon, he regarded Abel's happiness in the enjoyment of God's favour as the source of his own misery; and after many struggles, as we cannot doubt, and many remonstrances of conscience, he formed, and executed the deliberate plan of putting his brother to death.

Now, were I to warn any one against perpetrating such a crime, or were I to speak of it as a possible thing that he might be guilty of it, I can easily conceive that he would shrink with horror from the very thought of it, and would be ready to say with Hazael of old, "Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this thing?" It may be so,—nay, I believe it is so,—though no man can ever be beyond the need of being warned and admonished against any one sin, which other men of like passions with himself have committed. But, granting that such admonitions and warnings are altogether unnecessary, a very solemn question remains behind. When did Cain's sin begin to assume a murderous character in the sight of God,—of Him who searches

the heart, and tries the reins of the children of men? Not, surely, at the moment only when his murderous intention was embodied in the bloody deed? From the moment that he felt and began to cherish a sentiment of dislike and enmity against his brother, God saw in his heart a principle at work which, but for the restraints of His own providence and grace, could only end where it did. And but for these restraints, so it would be in every case. There is more of guilt, therefore, than I fear many see or think of, in the angry feelings to which they give way, and over which they sometimes brood. It is in such unholy feelings, whether of anger, or revenge, or unlawful desires of any kind, that the most flagrant crimes have their origin; and if tried by the pure and holy law of God, multitudes will be found to no small extent chargeable with these crimes, though they would shudder at the thought of actually perpetrating them. With what care, then, should parents watch and check the growth of such feelings in the minds of their children! And what a wholesome lesson may they not draw from the narrative before us, whereby to inculcate even on the youngest, provided they are capable of understanding the simplest story, the necessity of resisting and keeping down those feelings and passions which, though feeble and utterly impotent, do nevertheless contain the germ of the very crime which they would perhaps tremble to name! It is a very solemn declaration of our Lord, "Whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment; and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council; but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell-fire."

VI.

BLESSING ON NOAH.

GENESIS IX. 1-7.

We are told at the conclusion of the preceding chapter, that when Noah, on going forth of the ark, "builded an altar unto the Lord, and offered burnt-offerings on the altar, the Lord smelled a sweet savour; and the Lord said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; though the imagination of man's heart be evil from his youth; neither will I again smite every thing living, as I have done. While the earth remaineth, seed time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease." We cannot doubt that when God intimated his acceptance of Noah's sacrifice, whether by fire from heaven or otherwise, he did at the same time communicate this his gracious purpose of forbearance and mercy towards all the succeeding generations of men. And, in the circumstances in which Noah stood, such a communication must have been fraught with consolation beyond what we can well conceive of. He had witnessed a scene of desolation which, with all its accompanying horrors, must have made an indelible impression on his mind; and the possibility of such a calamity again occurring, could hardly fail at times to awaken very painful misgivings. From what he had seen of the depravity of human nature, and the state of hardened impenitency to which mankind had at last arrived, and from the solemn declaration of God himself when he said, that "every

imagination of the thoughts of man's heart was only evil continually, and that it repented him that he had made man on the earth," Noah might naturally conclude that when his posterity did again increase and repeople the earth, it would only be to fill it again with violence and crime, till the rectitude of the divine government rendered it necessary to visit them with another overwhelming judgment. With what gratitude, then, must Noah have received the intimation that God would never again smite every living thing, as he had done! This promise did not imply that in consequence of the judgment with which the former race of men had been visited, human nature had been essentially changed, and that Noah's posterity would no longer be capable of perpetrating such wickedness as had brought in the flood of waters on the world of the ungodly; for we are expressly told that "God said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake, though the imagination of his heart be evil from his youth." But it intimated that thenceforth the restraints of God's providence would be felt to be more powerful, and the communication of his grace more abundant,—that the Church should never again be so reduced in numbers and so weakened in strength,—and that forbearance and long-suffering should be exercised towards all, so that even the unthankful and impenitent should participate in the blessings of that ordination whereby it was determined that "while the earth remaineth," even until the consummation of all things, "seed time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease."

For four thousand years men of every succeeding generation have witnessed the faithfulness and experienced the gracious nature of this promise, though every successive age has furnished proofs in abundance that human nature is still what it was,—that men are as prone as ever to forget God, to despise his threatenings, and to presume upon the very mercy and forbearance for which they feel no gratitude. Nay, in many instances, the ungodliness and unrighteousness of men have equalled, or surpassed any thing that the old world could have exhibited; and from time to time God has interposed, in the way of retributive justice, to visit both individuals and communities with expressions of his holy displeasure. But amidst all these mani-

festations of the depravity and practical atheism of men, and notwithstanding these partial revelations of the wrath of God against their ungodliness and unrighteousness, his promise has been fulfilled,—his covenant of peace has never been broken. Not only has he endured, with much long-suffering, those who have converted the gifts of his bounty into instruments of daring rebellion against himself, and continued to load with his benefits multitudes more, who, though not chargeable with open profligacy and profaneness, acknowledge not the bountiful hand that feeds them,—but how much forgetfulness and insensibility has he borne with at the hand of those who profess to believe that to his grace and mercy in Christ Jesus they are indebted even for temporal good things, inasmuch as it is only in consequence of the Covenant of Grace that any forbearance could be exercised towards sinful and guilty creatures! For how frequently do professing Christians, even the most blameless in point of moral character and conduct, receive the gifts of God's bounty as matters of course,—as supplies of wants and comforts, the absence or diminution of which they seldom or never reckon upon, and would wonder if it took place! God has so fully and faithfully performed his promise, by establishing and sustaining the various revolutions of the natural world, that his very wisdom, and power, and faithfulness have been the occasion of his being with multitudes altogether overlooked, and even with believers, too often forgotten.

It is very true that seed time and harvest, and summer and winter, and cold and heat, and day and night have never ceased; and it is also true that this regularity in the return of the seasons is, so far as we can comprehend, the result of certain established laws, of which there has been no reversal, and from which there is no deviation. But how often have these laws been put in the place of Him whose skill contrived them, and whose power preserves them in operation! And with how many would it be thought a very fanatical notion to imagine that the promise to Noah has had any thing to do with the maintenance of those laws in all the beautiful regularity of their movements, and in all the beneficence of their results! It has been the language of scoffers in all ages, "Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things con-

tinue as they were from the beginning of the creation." But it is especially melancholy to think that they who would shrink with horror from such scoffing, are nevertheless chargeable with practically disowning, inasmuch as they forget or overlook, the hand and the promise of God in the constantly returning supply of worldly comforts with which he is daily blessing them. And all this, too, in the face of the plainest intimations which he is from time to time giving us, that, without in any degree departing from his purpose of mercy and forbearance, and without in any manner acting inconsistently with his promise, he can, by the operation of the very laws of nature, to which there has so often been idolatrously paid the homage which is due to himself, overwhelm any community, or any portion of a community, in misery and ruin. But the Lord is gracious, and slow to anger. "He is kind even to the unthankful." "He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good; he sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." And, even in respect of the Church, the body of true believers, it may still be said of them, as it was said of old, "I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed."

But the general assurance which Noah received, that the earth was never again to be overflowed with the waters of a flood, was not the only mark of the divine grace and condescension which was vouchsafed to him. That assurance was followed up by other promises and encouragements, the full import and value of which cannot be apprehended without keeping in view the peculiar circumstances in which he was placed. He was then the head of the only surviving family of the human race,—himself far advanced in years,—cast upon a world which, by the desolating scourge of God, had become for a season a waste, howling wilderness; and though such a situation was well fitted to unite the members of that family in the closest bonds of filial and brotherly affection, still it was a dreary condition,—one in which they greatly needed to be assured that none of them were to be the last survivors of their race, destined to die in solitude, without a friend to close their eyes, and soothe them in their last moments. And such assurance was given them when "the Lord blessed Noah and his sons, and said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth;" for it was thereby vir-

tually declared, that the world was again to be peopled as it was before, and that they would never more witness such a desolation as they had already witnessed. But their condition was desolate in another respect. Though, by the miraculous subjection to Noah's authority of every living creature, he was enabled to provide for the preservation of their race in the earth, it did not necessarily follow that he and his posterity were to retain in all time coming the same dominion over the creatures. Adam forfeited that dominion when he forfeited the favour and lost the fellowship of God; and though for a certain time it was restored to Noah, as fully and completely as it was enjoyed by Adam, that was only for a special purpose and a given time; and the temporary nature of this command over the lower animals was very plainly intimated to him, when the raven which he sent out of the ark, instead of returning, went forth to and fro, until the waters were dried up from off the earth,—and when the dove, in like manner, on being sent forth the third time, "returned not again to him any more." And what, then, may we suppose to have been his feeling when he contemplated the utter helplessness of himself and his family as to adopting any efficient means for their preservation against the rapidly-increasing numbers of the wild beasts of the field? It could not be other than a feeling of apprehension and anxiety lest he and his might one day fall a sacrifice to the instinctive ferocity of creatures to whose strength and numbers they could oppose no effectual resistance. But from this anxiety also he was graciously delivered; for the Lord said unto him, "The fear of you, and the dread of you, shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every fowl of the air, upon all that moveth upon the earth, and upon all the fishes of the sea: into your hand are they delivered." To Noah this grant must have been especially valuable; and the promise which accompanied it must have contributed largely to his comfort and feeling of security. But his posterity have to this day participated in the benefits of that grant, and experienced the faithfulness of the promise. Men have had the mastery of the beasts of the field; for if there have been occasional exceptions to this general state of things, they have been such only as to show what formidable enemies man would have in the lower animals, had not the fear of him and the dread of him been laid

upon them by the power of Him in whose hand is the breath of every living thing.

But it was not merely protection which by this grant was secured to Noah and his posterity. The beasts of the field were delivered into his hand, to be rendered subservient to his convenience and his comfort; and need I dwell on the amazing extent to which they have been made to contribute to man's present enjoyments and well-being? None, I think, can reflect on the endless variety of ways in which they have ministered to these enjoyments without feelings of admiration,—and, if in a right frame of mind, without sentiments also of gratitude to the Giver of all good. On this subject, however, as on all others, men are prone to forget God, and to overlook the operation of his hand. Their own intelligence and skill may appear to them sufficient to account for the subjection of the lower animals to their authority, and for their subserviency to their comfort; and while they look around with self-complacency on the marvellous extent to which the other creatures of God have been laid under contribution to the use of man, they may feel, if they do not say, "By the strength of my hand have I done it, and by my wisdom, for I am prudent." No doubt, it is very true that the skill of man as an intelligent being is the means whereby he avails himself of the grant which the Creator gave him of authority and power over nature, both animate and inanimate. But the devout believer in the Bible will remember, and gratefully acknowledge, that it is still a grant,—the renewal of a grant which had once been forfeited,—and that even permission to employ the creatures for his use might and would have been unavailing, had not the bountiful Giver at the same time so ordered and arranged the works of his hands, as to enable man to employ his skill and strength in subjugating these creatures to his authority. He cannot, therefore, overlook the immediate hand of God in the rich provision which has thus been made for supplying the wants, and ministering to the comfort of man; and while he enjoys his own share of these comforts, he will gratefully acknowledge that he owes them all to a special gift of the bountiful Creator, who has said to man in respect to all other creatures, "Into your hands are they delivered."

But there is one circumstance connected with, or rather in-

volved in this grant, which must have been especially seasonable and interesting to Noah. It appears, that, previously to the flood, men did not, at least with the divine permission, use animals for food ; and we cannot doubt, from what is recorded of Noah's character, that without such permission, expressly granted to him, he never would have ventured so to use them. This permission, however, was granted not only in the general declaration, "Into your hands are they delivered," but in express terms, as recorded in the following verse,—"Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you ; even as the green herb have I given you all things." I need hardly remark, that, in the circumstances in which Noah and his family were placed, this permission must have appeared to them peculiarly beneficent. The earth had but just emerged from the waters of the flood, whereby it had been laid waste and desolate; and it could only be after a season of toil and sore travail that Noah could eat of the fruit thereof. It was to him, therefore, another, and a very striking manifestation of the divine goodness,—another intimation of the forbearance, compassion, and tenderness with which God was willing to deal with men, for the purpose of securing their confidence and submission, that he did then say, "Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you ; even as the green herb have I given you all things." This, then, completed Noah's right of dominion over every living thing : and that right has been held and exercised by every subsequent generation of his posterity. To man has been conveyed, by a special grant of the Creator, the Most High God, the possessor of heaven and earth, permission to employ the services of every living thing that is fitted to serve him, and to use for food every creature that is suited for such a purpose.

And is the grant, then, absolutely unqualified ? Is man permitted to use the lower animals in any way that he thinks may contribute to his worldly advantage, at whatever cost of suffering to the animals themselves ? There is certainly no qualification here expressed, to the effect of forbidding men to torture, or inflict unnecessary suffering on the brute creation. But every man's conscience, unless he be so debased and hardened as to be but little if at all removed from the brute which he tortures, must testify that he is a lawless and ungodly usurper of a power

which was never granted to him, if he claims the right of inflicting unnecessary pain on an unoffending creature, for the gratification of his own selfishness. And there are to be found in Scripture intimations of this truth far more touching, and far better fitted to reach the heart and the feelings, than even an express prohibition of cruelty would have been. In the institution of the Sabbath,—an institution which the experience of all ages has proved to be as beneficial to men's worldly interests as it is conducive to their spiritual good,—there is an express and an interesting reference to the rest which was thereby to be afforded to the lower animals. It is ascribed to God, as one of the glorious attributes of his nature, that he careth for these his creatures: "Thy righteousness is like the great mountains; thy judgments are a great deep; O Lord, thou preservest man and beast." "The eyes of all wait upon thee; and thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing." And one of the reasons assigned for God's sparing mercy towards Nineveh, after the prophet had proclaimed its coming destruction, was, that besides a vast multitude of human beings, it contained "also much cattle."

These are sufficiently clear and affecting intimations of the limits which God intended to set to the grant which he gave to man of dominion over the lower animals. And how has man exercised the power given him by that grant,—a power in the very bestowing of which there was an appeal to his feelings against any thing like cruelty, or the infliction of unnecessary pain? Alas! has he not revelled in the very wantonness of conscious power, and, for the gratification of the lowest and most debasing passions of his nature, subjected unoffending animals to the most excruciating torture? Nay, is it not a melancholy fact, with which every man is every day familiar, that the very creatures that have rendered to man the longest continued and the most valuable services, are those that are doomed to bear the largest share of man's more than brutal ferocity, whether for the purposes of avarice, or the gratification of blind animal passion, —the passion of reckless anger and irritation? But there is a God who ruleth over all, and executes righteous judgment,—a God who feedeth the ravens, and supplieth the wants of the

young ravens when they cry,—an universal Father, without whom not a sparrow falleth to the ground. And how fearful the amount of guilt which must one day be reckoned for at his judgment-seat on this one subject of human tyranny and oppression, when men shall render an account of their stewardship, and be asked,—and compelled, moreover, to answer,—how they have used the power which was entrusted to them over all the living creatures of this world, when it was said of them all, "Into your hand are they delivered!"

It has already been observed, that of the grant which was given to Noah, whereby all living creatures were delivered into his hand, no qualification or limitation has been recorded to the effect of expressly forbidding him to exercise cruelty on these creatures. There was, however, one qualification very distinctly stated, which, in the opinion of many, was designed to prevent any such cruelty. The qualification is recorded in the fourth verse:—"But flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall ye not eat." It has been supposed that this injunction was intended to prevent, what in future times was practised by those nations which had forgotten or which disregarded the divine precept, namely, using as food parts of animals that were yet alive; and if so, it was a very plain and explicit condemnation of all such cruelties. I do not say that this might not be one of the purposes of the qualification or prohibition here recorded. But I am inclined to the opinion, that the main purpose for which men were forbidden to eat blood, was to give greater solemnity and sacredness in their eyes to the doctrine of atonement by the shedding of blood. This was the grand truth which from the beginning was inculcated on fallen man, and by the faith of which he was to be sanctified and saved; and though, in the brevity with which the history of Noah is given, nothing is here said of the reason of the prohibition, we are not to conclude that it was not fully explained to Noah himself. And, in fact, we do find this reason expressly given at a future period, when the injunction in the passage under consideration was laid anew upon the people of Israel, and laid upon them with the most solemn sanctions:—"And whatsoever man there be of the house of Israel, or of the strangers that sojourn among you, that eateth any manner of blood: I will

even set my face against that soul that eateth blood, and will cut him off from among his people. For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul." Such was the care with which the great doctrine of remission through the shedding of blood was kept before the minds of men. It was, as it were, forced on their attention, in the ordinary and every-day concerns of life, by the simple and solemn commandment, that blood was not to be regarded or used as a common thing,—that it was the atonement for the soul,—and that, if not used in sacrifice, as the type of the great Atonement, it was to be poured out on the earth. And so, we cannot doubt, it was explained to Noah in connection with the first promise of a Saviour,—thus reminding him that the ground of all the forbearance which God had long exercised towards the old world,—of the grace in which Noah himself and his family had so largely participated,—and of the compassion and mercy which were to be manifested towards his posterity, was the atoning sacrifice of Him who as the seed of the woman was to bruise the serpent's head, and whose own sufferings in the conflict were not only foretold, but prefigured by the shedding of blood in the ordinance of sacrifice.

It thus appears that the permission granted to Noah and his posterity to use animals as food, was employed to keep more steadily before their eye, and to impress more deeply on their mind, the great doctrine of the Atonement, by perpetually reminding them that blood was not to be used as a common thing. And from this representation of the sacredness of blood as a holy thing, occasion was taken to convey to Noah another assurance of God's gracious care for the protection of himself and his posterity from violence. We have already seen with what marvellous condescension God was pleased to set Noah's mind at rest on the various subjects about which we could suppose him to have been at times discouraged and perplexed. He was assured that the earth should never again be overflowed with a flood,—that his family should not live and die in the state of solitariness in which they then were,—that the beasts of the field should not only be restrained from injuring him, but be rendered obedient to his authority and subservient to his comfort,

—and that he had full permission to avail himself of them as the means of subsistence. It might be supposed that, after all these gracious promises, Noah could require nothing more to dissipate his fears, and set his mind at rest as to God's gracious designs towards himself and his posterity,—especially as, in the course of the communication which he received, he was directed to the ground of all this marvellous grace and condescension, even the atoning sacrifice of Him who in the fulness of time was to appear to destroy the works of the devil.

But there was still another quarter from which Noah might naturally enough fear that he himself, or the godly of his posterity after him, would be exposed to danger,—namely, the enmity of the ungodly and unbelieving of his own descendants. The earth had before been filled with violence, and the same violence might again to a certain extent be manifested. But on this point also his misgivings were quieted, by the very solemn fence which God was pleased to place around the life of man, when he said, "And surely your blood of your lives will I require; at the hand of every beast will I require it, and at the hand of man; at the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man. Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man." And having thus declared that he would himself be the avenger of blood,—avenging it both upon man and upon beast,—he put it, as it were, to Noah, whether he was not contented to address himself peacefully and diligently to the duties of his place and condition as the father of the family by which the earth was again to be peopled;—as if he had said, You have now received all the security which you can expect, or even desire, as to your own preservation and that of your posterity; therefore, "be ye fruitful, and multiply: bring forth abundantly in the earth, and multiply therein."

Such was the gracious method of procedure which God was pleased to adopt towards Noah, in seeking to win and secure the confidence of himself and his posterity after him. And in all the promises thus made to Noah, the men of every succeeding age have largely participated. I need hardly remark of the very solemn language employed in the fifth verse respecting the inquisition which God there declared he would make

for blood, that it both authorises and requires those on whom has devolved the execution of laws that the murderer shall be put to death. But it implies a great deal more. It contains the assurance that, in the course of his providence, God will in an especial manner aid the efforts of those whose duty it is to search out and discover the guilty perpetrators of a crime in which he is in a peculiar manner insulted, by an outrage on the creatures which had been formed in his own image. Of course, the promise is not to be understood as absolute and unqualified, —so absolute as that no instance ever can occur in which a murderer remains undetected, and in the present life unpunished. Such absolute promises would require perpetual miracles. But the history of the world bears ample testimony to the fact, that, in the ordinary course of his providence, God does make inquisition for blood, and in ways the most unexpected brings to light the deed of darkness. It is, in truth, become a proverbial saying, that murder cannot be concealed,—and its being proverbial proves that it is the result of large experience and extended observation. And who, then, can estimate the extent to which the assurance given to Noah is every day verified in the restraint which is laid on the evil passions of men, whereby the earth is prevented from becoming, as it once was, filled with violence? And so it is, we cannot doubt, with many other crimes besides that of shedding blood; for manifold and marvellous are the ways in which a man's sin unexpectedly finds him out, and innumerable the means by which crime is prevented when on the very point of being perpetrated. No doubt, the instances are also very numerous in which such sins escape, not punishment only, but even detection, in the present life. But there is a day coming when they can escape neither,—when the most hidden works of darkness shall be brought to light, and the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed; and when they who have defied the most searching scrutiny of men shall stand revealed in the presence of Him who searcheth the hearts and trieth the reins of the children of men, and "who shall render unto every man according to the deeds done in the body, whether they have been good, or whether they have been evil." Oh to be then found clothed in the righteousness of Him for whose sake God "seeth no iniquity in Jacob, and no perverseness in Israel!"

VII.

COVENANT WITH NOAH.

GENESIS IX. 8–17.

THE word Covenant, which occurs in almost every verse of the passage under consideration, signifies an agreement between two parties, whereby they become mutually bound to perform certain conditions expressed or implied in the covenant. Such an agreement between man and man is a very simple transaction. They are essentially on a footing of equality. They are at liberty to enter into a covenant-relation to each other or not as they please; and they are understood to be equally competent to fulfil their mutual obligations,—as well as to be equally benefited by that fulfilment. But nothing of all this can apply to a covenant between God and man. In such a covenant, the parties cannot in any sense even approach to a footing of equality. If God is pleased to propose entering into any thing like a covenant with men, it is not competent for them to accept or refuse that proposal as they please; inasmuch as the almighty, all-wise, and bountiful Creator is entitled to prescribe to his intelligent creatures what terms he pleases, and to lay upon them whatsoever obligations he thinks fit. In respect, also, of their power or ability to fulfil the terms so prescribed to them, that power is derived altogether from himself. And even when they have fulfilled these terms, they have only done what they were bound by the very law of their being to do, independently of any pledge or promise on the part of God to bestow upon them any

special reward for the fulfilment of such terms; for he never can require of his intelligent creatures any thing but what it is their interest as well as their duty to comply with. In no possible way, therefore, can men be parties in a covenant with God on the same ground as they may enter into covenant with one another. Such a covenant, on the part of God, must always be an act of grace,—a free promise, to which they could establish no claim, and for the fulfilment of which they could make no equivalent return. "Men cannot be profitable unto God, as he that is wise may be profitable unto himself." And all this, it is obvious, would hold true, even if men were in a state of innocence, and able to fulfil the conditions prescribed to them. It was the sovereign right of God as Creator to lay upon Adam any injunction or prohibition which he saw fit, and on the pain of incurring such punishment as appeared to him right; and with such injunction it was Adam's duty to comply, independently of any special promise of reward for such compliance. It was altogether an act of grace, then, that God did promise such a reward in the event of Adam continuing obedient,—even the endless and uninterrupted enjoyment of the blessed existence into which he had been called. And it was most marvellous condescension on the part of the Almighty Creator to deal with his dependent creature in the way of covenanting, pledging his faithfulness and his truth that on certain conditions he would bestow certain blessings, as if they were a reward which the creature had merited, and could therefore reckon upon as a matter of right.

But how much more marvellous in our eyes should the divine condescension appear in his manner of dealing with men, now that they are become guilty and depraved! By their fall, they not only forfeited all the blessings which had been secured to them by the Covenant of Works, but became subject to the punishments whereby that covenant had been sanctioned. It was impossible, therefore, that in themselves they could ever become parties in another covenant with God. Satisfaction to divine justice for that which had already been broken was indispensably necessary,—so necessary that it could neither be modified nor remitted; and if that satisfaction was to be made by themselves, they must have been subjected to the perpetual

endurance of the threatened punishment. But provision was made, by the appointment of a Mediator, for the full satisfaction of divine justice, and the free forgiveness of the guilty. The Covenant of Grace,—a covenant in the strictest sense of the word, the parties being equal,—was entered into between God the Father and God the Son, wherein it was provided that the Son, as Mediator between God and sinners, should assume our nature, should be made of a woman, made under the law,—that in this character and condition he should bear the sins of many, even as many as the Father had given him,—and that, as the reward of his obedience and his sufferings, wherein he endured the penalty of these sins, His people were to be forgiven and received into the divine favour, sanctified by his Spirit, and at last made partakers of all the glory and blessedness of his heavenly kingdom. Of this Covenant of Grace man could know nothing till it was revealed to him; for no created intelligence could have conceived that such a scheme for vindicating the honour of the divine law, and redeeming the guilty transgressors of that law from its curse, could ever have been devised. But that there was such a covenant was intimated to Adam, when it was said in his hearing, "The seed of the woman shall bruise the head of the serpent," and when he was commanded to offer sacrifice as the means of approaching God with acceptance. To this covenant, therefore, must be traced all the mercy and forbearance which mankind have since experienced at the hand of God,—not only the consolation and good hope which believers enjoy, and the spiritual blessings of which they are made partakers, but the long-suffering patience also which has been and still is exercised, even towards the impenitent and unbelieving. It was for the purpose of carrying into effect the provisions of this covenant that Noah was spared when the old world was destroyed; and it is for the same purpose that, since then, seed time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night, have never ceased,—and never will cease, so long as there remains uncalled and unconverted one of that great multitude which no man can number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, whom Christ has purchased with his own blood.

But it is not merely to the divine mercy and forbearance as the consequence of the Covenant of Grace that I at present refer.

I would especially advert to the manner in which that mercy and forbearance are exercised, as placing in a very affecting light the divine condescension, as we find it strikingly exemplified in the passage under consideration. Not only has God proclaimed pardon through the blood of atonement, inviting sinners to return to him in penitence and faith, assuring them of his readiness to forgive their offences and heal their backslidings, and waiting long and patiently for their acceptance of his overtures and their compliance with his invitation; but he has vouchsafed to deal with them as one man deals with another, entering into a covenant-relation with them, pledging his truth and rectitude for the due fulfilment of the promises of his grace, as men are wont to be pledged or bound by solemn covenants or agreements. We have already seen that men never can either undertake or fulfil conditions which could be regarded as equivalent to or meriting the fulfilment of what God engages to fulfil. But it is this very consideration that renders his method of dealing with them more affecting. It shows that what He engages by solemn obligation to perform is itself an act of grace, —a promise which he was in no respect bound to give, but which he not only gives but confirms by an oath, that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, they should have strong consolation who have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before them in the Gospel. And such, in a remarkable manner, is the covenant spoken of in the passage before us. It is plain that it was not a covenant in the ordinary acceptation of the word, inasmuch as there is no mention made of any terms or conditions being prescribed to Noah and his sons, on the performance of which was to be suspended the fulfilment of the promise that there never should be any more a flood to destroy the earth. The promise itself was altogether of free grace, inasmuch as God was under no obligation to give it; and it was given, moreover, absolutely and unconditionally, unaccompanied with any stipulation requiring of Noah and his family certain conditions,—failing which the divine promise should not be fulfilled. But to give him the strongest possible assurance of the immutability of the divine purpose, and the faithfulness of the divine promise, it was declared to be a Covenant,—a solemn agreement, whereby Noah might regard the

promised blessing as that to which he had a right or title,—a right the strength of which lay in the truth and rectitude of God.

It is no doubt true as an abstract proposition that a divine promise, considered in its own nature, does not and cannot admit of being confirmed, or strengthened, or made more sure; for "God is not a man that he should lie, nor the son of man that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?" He might, therefore, have justly required men to believe and rely on his word without any such confirmation as we find given in Scripture; and on their doubting or disbelieving it, he might have held them guilty of the most presumptuous of all sins, "the sin," as the apostle expresses it, "of making God a liar." But all this only brings out more fully, and in a more affecting light, the marvellous grace and condescension of God, in deigning to transact with men as they are wont to transact with one another, and to give them the kind of assurance on which they are accustomed most confidently to rely in the ordinary intercourse of life. And so he did with Noah. In language the most solemn he announced his gracious purpose, "I, behold, I establish my covenant with you, and with your seed after you." Nay, for the purpose of magnifying the riches of his mercy, and as if to assure Noah that no future rebellion of the children of men, however open or extended it might become, would provoke him to withdraw his promise or break his covenant, he condescended to include within that covenant even the inferior animals. And having done so, he repeated his gracious promise in terms so absolute and express as to show that it was as free as it was sure. "And I, behold, I establish my covenant with you, and with your seed after you; and with every living creature that is with you, of the fowl, of the cattle, and of every beast of the earth with you; from all that go out of the ark, to every beast of the earth. And I will establish my covenant with you; neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of a flood; neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth."

I have had occasion to observe, in the course of these remarks, that all the examples of God's forbearance and mercy,

both towards the Church, and towards the world of ungodly and impenitent men, are to be traced to that counsel of peace, the Covenant of Grace, entered into, as all the counsels of God were, from eternity, between the Father and the Son. In virtue of that covenant, the present state of things is to endure until all whom the Father gave to the Son shall have been called, converted, sanctified, and saved. And if, in the course of God's dealings with men, he has condescended to enter into covenant with them, it is not because they could fulfil their part of any such covenant, but because Christ died to satisfy the divine law, and vindicate the rectitude of the divine government, so as to render it consistent with the character and perfections of God to deal with them as if they were competent to enter into covenant with him. But, in truth, such a covenant, as we have already seen, was just a promise on the part of God, whereby he bound himself to bestow certain blessings, as if men could make such a return as to entitle them to these blessings. It was on this ground that God made, or rather established, his covenant with Noah; for no terms or conditions were prescribed to Noah, as necessary to be fulfilled in order that the divine promise should be performed. But it is not enough to say that the covenant referred to in the passage before us was the consequence or result of the Covenant of Grace,—a promise of mercy and forbearance founded on the great atonement made by Him who was the Lamb of God slain from the foundation of the world. The covenant made with Noah was in fact to him, and to all true believers of his posterity, the Covenant of Grace,—one of the various ways in which God was pleased to reveal to his people in the old time the purposes of his grace and mercy, and by which he applied to them, for their salvation, the blessings of the Redeemer's purchase. It will be observed that on going forth of the ark, "Noah offered a burnt-offering unto the Lord, and the Lord smelled a sweet savour." In these few and emphatic words, a great deal of meaning is conveyed. They plainly intimate that Noah rested all his hopes of acceptance with God on the blood of atonement,—that is, on the sacrifice which was one day to be offered in the person of the promised Saviour. And they do as plainly declare that Noah found grace and acceptance,—that he was justified freely through the redemption that

is in Christ Jesus,—and that he had become heir of the righteousness which is by faith.

When it is said, therefore, that God established his covenant with Noah, we are evidently to understand that there was conveyed to that individual a comforting sense of his personal interest in all the blessed provisions of the Covenant of Grace,—and that he received the promise of God, assuring him that the world should never again be destroyed by a flood, as in the first instance an assurance that he was personally accepted with God, and had been received into a state of favour and reconciliation with him. It is true, a great deal more was communicated to Noah than merely an intimation that his person and his services had been accepted ; for the promise which he received was one in which all men, believers and unbelievers, righteous and wicked, were largely to participate. Still, it was to him a new revelation of the Covenant of Grace, and a clearer manifestation than had yet been made of the divine purposes of mercy towards his Church and people. It certainly was not necessary for his own personal salvation that he should be assured of God's purpose never again to destroy the world with a flood, and he had no warrant to ask, nor any ground to expect, such an assurance. But when it was graciously given to him, it must have contributed mightily to strengthen his faith in that great Atonement, the type of which, in the sacrifice which he offered, and which was accepted, had soothed his anxieties, dismissed his fears, and imparted to him the peace of God that passeth understanding. And however much he might be comforted with the thought that his posterity were never to witness or endure such an awful calamity as he had witnessed and escaped, still his main source of joy and consolation must have been, that this covenant with himself, and with his posterity, and with the beasts of the field, and with every living creature, was an intimation of his own acceptance with God, and of the acceptance of all who like him should embrace and cleave to the overtures of divine mercy.

The covenant, then, which was made, or rather established, with Noah, was in fact a new and clearer intimation than had before been given of the everlasting covenant between the Father and the Son for the salvation of the Church,—his elect

people; and it was one of the ways by which believers of old were strengthened and encouraged to hope that they were within the bond of that covenant. And in this view of the subject we shall find that a deeper interest attaches to the subsequent verses of the passage before us than may at first sight be supposed. We are there told that besides the repeated declaration in the preceding verses that God would establish his covenant with Noah, and with his posterity, and with every living creature that was on the earth, a sign was added in confirmation of God's promise, and for the strengthening of Noah's faith. This was an additional proof of the divine grace and condescension; and the appointment of the sign is expressed in language which no devout man can read, I think, without receiving from it a very deep impression of the unsearchable riches of the divine compassion. God speaks of his covenant as if it were a possible thing that he might forget, or be provoked to retract it; and he appoints the rainbow as a sign of that covenant, that he may look upon it and remember his promise, and give to every living creature, as often as the bow appeared, a new pledge or assurance that he would never forget his promise, or break the everlasting covenant between him and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth. The rainbow is, and, as we have ground to suppose, has always been the effect of natural causes, operating in obedience to the will of the Creator, according to an established rule or law; and in certain circumstances it cannot fail to make its appearance. Provision is thus made for the frequent, I might say, the necessary renewal of the divine promise, that the waters of a flood shall never again overflow the earth; and viewing it simply in reference to that promise, how marvellous is the manifestation which it affords of the divine condescension in thus adapting his procedure to the weakness of human nature, and employing every conceivable method of keeping alive in their minds a sense of his presence and sovereignty, and of securing their confidence in his mercy and faithfulness! Even in this its limitation to temporal blessings, the rainbow must have been to Noah an object of very deep interest, —one on which he never could look without feelings of admiration, gratitude, and confidence.

But it was to him, and to every individual of his believing

posterity, a pledge of better and still richer blessings,—even a sacramental token whereby were signified and sealed to him all the benefits of the Covenant of Grace. Indeed, it was only in this view of it that it could minister to his comfort, or afford him any sure ground of confidence in regard to temporal blessings. For to ungodly men, to those who had not laid hold of the promise, and had not found peace with God and made a covenant with Him by sacrifice, what could the bow in the cloud do in the way of ministering to their comfort, or assuring their hearts before God? Suppose they believed that the world would never again be drowned with a flood, and that the bow was a pledge or token of this truth,—the only use which they made or could make of it was, that they were thereby encouraged to sin without the dread of that retribution which had overtaken their guilty fathers. If they neither desired nor cared for those spiritual blessings which Noah had sought and found in the favour and fellowship of God, they must have regarded the sign or token of God's covenant as at the best only a pledge, that let their sins be what they might, they were safe from any such general calamity as had once desolated and laid waste the earth. And with such views of the subject, the bow in the cloud would soon cease to have any interest at all in their eyes. Men are ready enough to presume on the divine mercy, and to set at defiance the thunderings of divine judgments, even when they have no such ground to hope for exemption from these judgments as the token of God's covenant was fitted to afford; and if that token had any influence upon them at all, it would only be to render them more presumptuous and stout-hearted in their rebellion. And so it proved; for we advance little more than a page beyond the point of the history before us, till we find the posterity of Noah, though remembering what they had been told of the flood, yet so entirely forgetting or disbelieving God's promise as to be devising means whereby to preserve themselves from any similar calamity. It is obvious, therefore, as indeed we might infer from all that we know of human nature, that the promises of God, as to temporal good things, will be a ground of confidence and a source of consolation to those only who have sought reconciliation with him in the way of his own appointing. But to Noah the token of God's covenant must have been an inexhaustible

source of consolation and comfort. It was to him a pledge of the stability of that Covenant of Grace in which he had taken refuge, and of the efficacy of that atonement which had pacified his conscience. It was, moreover, an object to which he might direct the attention of his children, and by which he might convey to them a most concise and intelligible explanation of all that had been revealed to himself respecting the scheme of redeeming mercy. While he taught them to offer sacrifice as the only way of finding acceptance with God, he could point to the bow in the cloud as a token not only of their security against such an overwhelming judgment as he had seen executed on the human race, but of God's favour to all of them who really sought his favour in the appointed way; and thus in the institution of sacrifice, and the appointment of the rainbow as the sign,—and, to believers who looked at it in faith, the seal of the Covenant of Grace,—he put his posterity in possession of all that it was needful to know and believe for their salvation.

Nor has this token of God's covenant lost its interest to believers now. That covenant, indeed, has been fully and clearly revealed,—it has been sealed by the blood of the Mediator,—the One Great Atonement has been offered,—and the types of that atonement, even sacrifice itself, and all the other institutions of the Old Testament economy, have been set aside as unnecessary, —they have become old and have vanished away. But the bow of God still appears in all its freshness and in all its beauty; and though scoffers may think themselves entitled to disregard it as a token of God's covenant with every living creature, because they can explain how and in what circumstances it is formed, devout believers in the Bible can never fail to look at it with admiration and gratitude. They will see in it a pledge of the gracious promise that seed time and harvest, and summer and winter, and cold and heat, and day and night, shall never cease; and amidst the apparent exceptions to this established law, which, at certain times and in certain places, do occur, they will find in that pledge relief and rest from their perplexities and doubts; for in regard to the temporal blessings included in the covenant made with Noah, the rainbow is to believers still what it was to him, and will continue to be so while the earth remaineth. But it is especially interesting, as at once a token

and an emblem of the stability of the Covenant of Grace. It is so referred to by the prophet when he says, speaking to the Church in the name of the Lord, "In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee. For this is as the waters of Noah unto me; for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth, so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee." And as if to teach believers what use they are to make of this token of God's covenant,—what sentiments the sight of it should awaken,—and what reflections it ought to suggest, the throne of God is represented in the New Testament, in reference to the Mediator's work, as surrounded with a rainbow, and Christ himself as having a rainbow about his head. It was at first selected as, and still continues to be, an emblem of peace; and to those who are familiar with the Scriptures it will suggest reflections in abundance, equally instructive and consoling. In the midst of worldly comforts and enjoyments, the appearance of the bow will remind them that to the faithfulness of God's promise and the unwearied exercise of his beneficence they are indebted for them all. In seasons of adversity, of privation and sorrow, they can hardly, I think, look at it without being reminded of the tenderness and compassion of Him who has appointed them all their trials, and who has said that he afflicteth not willingly, nor grieveth the children of men. And in seasons of spiritual depression, it may suggest reflections full of encouragement and consolation. On this subject a pious writer has remarked, that the darker the cloud the brighter the rainbow,—a beautiful emblem of the Christian's experience that the darkest hour of spiritual dejection is often that in which he has seen the brightest manifestations of the love, and mercy, and faithfulness of God. And in whatever circumstances or mood of mind believers see the bow in the cloud, it can hardly fail to raise their thoughts to Him who is the faithful and the covenant-keeping God,—the hearer of prayer,—the God of peace,—the source of all consolation,—a very present help in the time of trouble.

VIII.

CALL OF ABRAHAM.

GENESIS XII. 1-5.

THE communication made to Abraham, as recorded in the passage now referred to, marks a very memorable period in the history of God's dealings with mankind generally, and especially with the Church. Two thousand years had already elapsed since man had become a fallen and sinful creature. In the course of that period various methods were employed to restrain the posterity of Adam from the ungodliness and immoralities to which they had become so prone, and to persuade them, in penitence and faith, to accept of pardon and reconciliation with God through the blood of atonement. The way of recovery through a Saviour was made known to Adam immediately on his fall. Cain's sin in rejecting the method of redemption, and afterwards in putting to death his brother who had embraced it, was visited with a special mark of the divine displeasure, whereby he was doomed to be a living monument of the terrible consequences of impenitence and unbelief. Enoch was commissioned to foretell the coming judgment of God on the growing iniquity of his time; and after walking with God, and exhibiting for three hundred years an example of holy living, he was translated without tasting of death,—an event equally full of encouragement to the righteous, and of solemn warning to the wicked. And that all these manifestations, both of the mercy and judgment of God, might be made known and remembered in all their simpli-

city, Adam's life was protracted to nearly a thousand years, during which he must have had opportunities without number of telling his posterity how they had fallen, and in what way they might be recovered. But, notwithstanding all this, men became daily more corrupt, until the earth was filled with violence, when the sentence went forth, "I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth." Still, however, a respite was granted them,—"God waiting with long-suffering while the ark was a preparing,"—and it was only in consequence of their continued impenitence that "the flood was at last brought in on the world of the ungodly."

The human race was thus reduced to a solitary family, and the earth itself for a season to a desolate wilderness. But it was a state of things, nevertheless, which in various respects was most favourable for the preservation of the truth among the succeeding generations of men. They had been warned, in a manner the most solemn, of the fatal consequences of despising the forbearance and long-suffering patience of God. The immediate descendants of Noah had been delivered from the hostility, and separated from the infectious example of the ungodly and profane. God not only established his covenant with that individual, but vouchsafed to him special marks of his favour and larger promises of his grace, confirming these promises by a sign, which was to remain a pledge of the divine faithfulness to believers of all after times. And that Noah might explain these truths to his posterity, and enforce them by his example, his life was protracted for three hundred and fifty years after the flood. Yet, notwithstanding all this, men did very soon fall away from the faith and obedience of the truth. Long before Noah's death, the defection had become so extensive, and the rebellion of his descendants so daring, that another divine interposition took place to break up the ungodly confederacy whereby they strengthened one another in their disobedience. God confounded their language so that they were scattered abroad upon the face of all the earth; and by the time referred to in the passage before us, idolatry had become very generally if not universally prevalent.

Such was the result of the various methods which had been employed, during a period of two thousand years, for restraining

the wickedness of men, and for preserving among them the knowledge of the way of salvation through a promised and prefigured Saviour. At no instant, indeed, during the whole of that long period, could it be said that there was not one who feared the Lord and took refuge in his mercy; for, even at the time of the greatest degeneracy, when the earth was filled with violence, and when the Lord said, "I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, for it repenteth me that I have made them,"—even then, it is recorded of Noah that "he found grace in the eyes of the Lord,"—that "he was a just man and perfect in his generations,"—and that "he walked with God." And when a divine interposition again took place, in the way of judgment, and when the language of men was confounded, so that they were scattered abroad on the face of the earth, we cannot doubt that, among the various tribes and families into which mankind were then divided, there were some who carried with them the holy lessons which had been inculcated by Noah, and who would find that, by the very judgment which had overtaken them in their being thus scattered abroad, they were placed in more favourable circumstances for cherishing the truths which they had been taught to their own spiritual good, as well as for communicating them to their fellow-men. We know, from certain notices to be found in the subsequent pages of the sacred history, that such was the case with some of the tribes which were scattered by the confusion of tongues; and it is not improbable, therefore, that it might have been so with all of them. Neither is it possible for us to determine how long the truth thus transmitted by tradition from Noah might continue to be preserved in such purity as to be saving knowledge to those who believed it,—or to what extent it might be so believed. I would willingly entertain the hope, that when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed, and the final judgment is passed, multitudes out of every one of these tribes, and tongues, and people, will be found among those "who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb,"—"the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world."

But after all that we have been told, and all that in charity we can hope, respecting the number of those who believed in and embraced the promised Saviour, it is obvious that com-

paratively it was a small number,—that mankind universally were prone to forget and forsake God,—that as they multiplied and congregated in numbers, they encouraged and strengthened one another in their ungodly practices,—and that if permitted to go on without being from time to time visited with divine judgment, as well as by some peculiar manifestation of divine mercy, the Truth would soon have been utterly lost, or at all events so grievously corrupted and perverted as to cease being the word of eternal life. This is the conclusion to which we are naturally brought by the recorded experience of two thousand years preceding the period referred to in the passage under consideration. And there we are told that God was pleased, in his grace and wisdom, to adopt another method for preserving among men the knowledge of the Truth, and for carrying into effect his purposes of mercy towards the Church. He selected an individual to whom he made a special revelation of these purposes, accompanied with such promises as were not only to secure permanently the knowledge and worship of Himself among some at least of the children of men, but the fulfilment of which necessarily separated that individual himself, as well as his posterity, from all the other nations of the world. That individual was Abraham, of whom we have the first notice in the preceding chapter, where the sacred historian tells us that he was descended from Shem, the son of Noah, of whom it was foretold by his father, in the spirit of prophecy, that the Lord God was to be his God; in other words, that in the line of Shem, throughout all succeeding generations, there was to be a Church,—a race to fear and serve the Lord.

But it would appear that, though thus descended of one in whose posterity God was to have a seed to serve him, Abraham, for a time at least, was not among the number of those who did cleave unto the true God; for it is plainly intimated in the Book of Joshua, that while he lived on the other side of the flood,—that is, on the other side of the great river, the river Euphrates,—his father's house, and, we may conclude, he also, served other gods, —so rapidly had men fallen into idolatry. There, however, Abraham received a communication from God, requiring him to leave that country; and it is accordingly recorded in the preceding chapter, that Terah, Abraham's father, took his family,

and went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan, and in their journeying came unto Haran, and dwelt there, until Terah the father of Abraham died. In recording this, the sacred historian says nothing of the reason of Terah's leaving Ur of the Chaldees. He states merely the fact that Terah and his family did so remove from the land of their nativity, and proceeds to record some other facts concerning them, till he ends the chapter with the record of Terah's death. But in resuming the subject in the chapter before us, he explains how it was that they thus removed. It was because "the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee." And in obedience to this command, we are here told that on his father's death, "Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came;" or, as it has been stated by an inspired apostle, "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went."

Here, then, we have the commencement of another method of dealing with men, which God was graciously pleased to adopt, for the purpose of securing for himself a Church and people in whom he might be glorified, amidst the prevailing idolatry and abounding iniquity of the world. And as he had been wont on former occasions of any remarkable change in the condition and circumstances of the Church, so on this, he renewed to Abraham the promise of a Saviour, or, in other words, established anew with him the Covenant of Grace, more fully, and in terms more explicit, than he had ever before revealed it. From the beginning a Saviour had been promised, and typified, too, in the ordinance of sacrifice. The efficacy of His atonement had been manifested in God's acceptance of Abel, in the translation of Enoch, and in the preservation of Noah. A new assurance of the unceasing nature of that efficacy had been given when the Lord smelled a sweet savour in Noah's sacrifice, and appointed the rainbow as a sign of his covenant,—and that a Saviour who was one day to appear to destroy the works of the devil had thus been

repeatedly and most expressly promised. But the communication vouchsafed to Abraham contained a great deal more than merely a renewal of the general promise that a Saviour was to come. The patriarch was assured that in his family this promise was to be fulfilled,—an assurance which necessarily implied that his descendants were to be under the special protection of God's providence, and to be preserved as a distinct people from the rest of the world, inasmuch as in no other way could it be made to appear that in Abraham all the families of the earth could be blessed. But Abraham was not left to draw this conclusion merely in the way of inference. He was expressly told that "God would make of him a great nation, and bless him, and make his name great, and make him a blessing." There was, therefore, in this communication to Abraham, a great addition to all that had been previously revealed of God's gracious purposes towards his Church. Noah had been told that the world should never again be destroyed by a flood; and from this, he and his believing posterity might have inferred that the Church would never again be reduced, in point of numbers, to so low a state as when one individual only with his family found grace in the sight of the Lord. But to Abraham it was declared that in his family there should never fail to be a Church, whatever the condition of the rest of the world might be. The promise, indeed, did not imply that all his descendants should be believers, members of the true Church; for, alas! their subsequent history does but too clearly show that at times a remnant only could be regarded as Abraham's spiritual seed. But from the time of the patriarch's call, as recorded in the passage before us, the people of God had an assurance which they had not before, that they never could be as few in number or as weakened in strength as they had formerly been,—that a refuge was provided for them, in which they should be safe alike from the violent hostility and the infectious example of those who had lapsed into idolatry,—and that in a given line they might look forward with confidence to the coming of Him who, as the seed of the woman, was to bruise the head of the serpent.

The period, then, referred to in the passage under consideration, is a very remarkable one in the history of God's dealings with the Church; and in this point of view is full of interest,

suggesting abundant matter of profitable meditation. But it is interesting also as bringing into view, and unfolding, as none but the Spirit of God could have unfolded, the character of an individual whose history and example furnish lessons of faith and practice which have been in past times, and will be till the end of the world, the subject of devout and profitable study to every true believer. In the call of Abraham there was a very decided example of the exercise of God's sovereignty, inasmuch as that individual, if not already an idolater, was in the way of becoming one. But his call afforded an equally striking example of the power of divine grace, in raising such an individual to the highest honour and distinction among the Scripture saints,—even the marvellous honour of being denominated in the pages of Inspiration, the "father of the faithful" and "the friend of God." That he should be a holy man,—so holy that none could associate with him without speedily discovering that he was prepared at all hazards to assert the supremacy and maintain the worship of the true God, in opposition to all the votaries of idolatry around him,—was necessary, as we find in his subsequent history, for the accomplishment of God's gracious purposes towards the generation of men among whom Abraham lived. But the holiness of his character has not been less interesting nor less instructive to men of every succeeding age, as furnishing one of the clearest examples both of what faith is in itself, and of what the fruits are which true faith will never fail to produce. "By faith," says an apostle, "Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went."

In such a call as this, there was obviously a great deal with which the carnal mind, always prone to disbelieve God's word, might have found a plausible pretext for quarrelling; and when we bear in mind what Abraham's condition was before he received this call, we cannot fail to perceive that it must have been perplexing to him. It is said of his father's house that they served other gods; and, therefore, though they might not be sunk in all the ignorance and debasement of idolatry, nor have utterly forgotten what had been transmitted to them from Noah respecting the character, perfections, and government of God, yet they could not have been entertaining either very distinct or

very elevated views of the wisdom, power, and sovereignty of the one only living and true God. But he was required to make an unconditional surrender of himself to the disposal of this unseen, and, to a great extent, unknown God, as the homage which was due to his rightful sovereign, and to look to the favour of the same God as his only and satisfying portion. He was not only called upon to convey his family and his substance from one country to another, and to exchange all the comforts of a settled dwelling-place, and all the hopeful prospects which an established acquaintance might present, for the perils of an untried journey, and the inconvenience which, for a time at least, he might expect to experience in a land of strangers;—but he was required to do all this without any other security for his protection by the way, or any other certainty of ultimately finding a peaceable establishment in the country to which he was going, than the simple word of the God who called him. In the communication which he received, there was no doubt a sufficiently clear and intelligible demonstration of God's sovereignty; and in the gracious promise that was annexed to the command, it was distinctly intimated to him that it was an act of grace as well as of sovereignty,—inviting him to withdraw his confidence from the false gods, that could neither protect nor deliver him, and to place it in the power and faithfulness of the living God, —to exchange a possession which, however promising, would be enjoyed but for a few years, and that only by sufferance, for an inheritance which was pledged to him and to his posterity by an immediate grant from the Proprietor of the universe,—and, through a Mediator, of whom he received a clearer revelation than had yet been vouchsafed to the children of men, to look up to God as his shield and his exceeding great reward. All this was implied in the communication made to Abraham; and in whatever way he might have received it, it was not only a most reasonable, but a most gracious demand that was made upon him. Still, however, the carnal mind might have suggested many difficulties, and urged many plausible arguments whereby to justify a refusal to comply with the command. He might have doubted whether the command really came from God,—from one who was able to do what he promised, or faithful to fulfil his promise. He might have alleged that there was no-

thing to prevent him from becoming a great nation, and ultimately a blessing to the rest of the world, in Chaldea, more than in the unknown land to which he was commanded to travel. And in reckoning up the probabilities of a safe journey and a peaceable establishment, it might have appeared to him that every thing was in favour of his remaining where he was. But to all this carnal reasoning no reply was made, no argument used to remove difficulties or to refute objections. The simple command was given, "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee;" and Abraham, acknowledging the authority of the command, pleased with the promise which accompanied it, and believing that He was faithful who had given the promise, "went forth," with his family, "to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came."

Now, such is in substance the manner of the divine procedure towards those who have heard the Gospel, but who have not yet cordially embraced it. Such persons are as really in a state of idolatry as Abraham and his family were,—labouring to attain to happiness in which the favour of God forms no ingredient,—wearying themselves in the pursuit of enjoyments which when secured only leave them at leisure to feel the ceaseless craving of some new and unsatisfied desire,—and thus spending day after day, of a short and precarious existence, in attempting to realize what will prove at last but vanity and vexation of spirit. And what is it that the Gospel announces to them? It tells them that they are spending their money for that which is not bread, and their labour for that which satisfieth not,—and that there is another and an enduring portion to which they may attain, and in the enjoyment of which they shall be perfectly and permanently blessed, even the favour and fellowship of God, on which they may enter at the instant by faith in the blood of Atonement. It calls upon them, therefore, to abandon the fruitless labour of seeking in perishing things a satisfying portion for the soul which is itself imperishable,—to withdraw their hearts from the lying vanities which, they know, have already deceived them, and must in the end leave them ruined and undone,—and to choose God himself, reconciled to them through the blood of the cross, as their chief portion, their exceeding great reward.

The things of sense, indeed, will be found to plead strongly in opposition to this call, just as the comforts which Abraham enjoyed in Chaldea might have pleaded against his undertaking a journey to the unseen and unknown land of Canaan,—frivolous and sinful gratifications may be magnified in the estimation of the sinner by the very idea of his for ever relinquishing them,—and even when he is brought to have some apprehension of the value of the divine favour, a consciousness of guilt may suggest many a doubt as to this favour being attainable. But He who formed the soul of man,—who endowed it with all its capacities of enjoyment,—and who is himself the only fountain of all happiness,—has expressly declared, that whatever resources it may have in the present life, to which it may betake itself for gratification, there can be no true peace or satisfaction to it but in the love and favour of its Creator; and that when the system of delusion in which it is here involved has come to an end, it will find that the wrath of God has desolated all its hiding-places, and that his fierce anger has burnt up and consumed every refuge of lies. And with this solemn denunciation, He has also declared, that it is not his will concerning sinners that they should perish,—that through the death of Christ he can and does proclaim a free forgiveness to the guiltiest of men who come to him in penitence and faith,—and that the very purpose for which the Gospel is circulating in the world is to make known this proclamation.

All this, then, is parallel to the call addressed to Abraham, when he was called to leave his country, and his kindred, and his father's house, and to take the truth and faithfulness of God in exchange for them all. And the man who has heard and embraced this gracious proposal of pardon and reconciliation with God is in a similar state to that of Abraham. Convinced that the divine favour is essential to his peace, the assurance of that favour becomes the object of his ardent desire, and, like the patriarch, he is willing to take it in exchange for country, and kindred, and father's house ; for however far short he may come of Abraham's faith and obedience, the principle by which he is actuated is essentially the same. Outwardly, indeed, he may not be called to manifest his faith in the same way,—nor may there be any visible removal of his person and his family from

one country to another, as an intimation of his having gone out into a place which he is after to receive for an inheritance. But there is in his case, as really as in that of the patriarch, a going out of the heart,—a withdrawing of it from one object, to which it formerly gave all the strength of its attachment, and a placing it upon another, which it now regards as its chief good. In the value and the variety of this world's enjoyments, he formerly believed that he had an inexhaustible storehouse for the supply of every want and the reparation of every loss; and, engrossed with these, eternity itself had not magnitude or importance enough in his apprehension to awaken any interest or concern. But having learned the unsatisfying nature of such gratifications, and having felt a hungering and thirsting which no earthly thing can satisfy, there is a transference of the affections and desires from what is transient to what is permanent,—a longing after a substantial and imperishable good,—a going out, a journeying, a travelling of the soul towards the rest which Christ has promised to the weary and the heavy laden. In his desire to reach this rest, he is willing to follow Christ as the Captain of his Salvation, in the way either of trial or of duty. His outward circumstances may be very different from those of the patriarch, and far less trying. But trials and difficulties he must encounter, and if he rises above them, it must be in the exercise of the same principle by which Abraham was actuated when he obeyed the divine command, "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee."

IX.

MELCHIZEDEK AND ABRAHAM.

GENESIS XIV. 17-20.

On reading this remarkable passage, a great many questions might naturally occur, both as to the person chiefly referred to, namely, Melchizedek, and the circumstances in which he was placed. Of himself, we are here simply told that he was king of Salem, and the priest of the Most High God; and though we find him elsewhere alluded to in Scripture, in illustration of the most interesting and sublime truth, the Priesthood of Christ, yet we are told nothing more than what is here stated of his personal and family history. Nay, the very notices which we have of him in the Epistle to the Hebrews would seem to intimate that all inquiries as to who he was, and whence he came, must prove vain and unsatisfactory; for the apostle tells us that he was without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life. The main object of the apostle in this statement was to show that Melchizedek did not come to the office of the priesthood as the sons of Aaron did under the law, who, in virtue of their descent, became priests, entering on the exercise of their holy functions at a certain age, and in like manner retiring from them after a given period of service. In this respect Melchizedek was without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life.

But though this was the chief point which the apostle had in view, that he might thereby illustrate the dignity of Christ's priesthood, and its superiority to that under the law, as set

forth by the Psalmist, "Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek;" yet the same statement does also, as it were, forbid us to inquire who Melchizedek was, or to what family he belonged. As if for the very purpose of furnishing the ground of the apostle's argument, nothing is said of the birth, parentage, or history of Melchizedek, beyond the few facts already stated,—a circumstance very remarkable when we bear in mind, that, in one respect, he was the most distinguished individual of whom we read in the Old Testament Scriptures,—and that with regard to other eminent persons there spoken of, their descent is most distinctly traced, and, in most cases, their birth and death carefully recorded. I do not think it necessary, therefore, to examine the various conjectures which may have been formed respecting Melchizedek, for at the best they are, and can be merely conjectures. I would only observe, that there appears to be no ground for the opinion which some have maintained, that he was a divine person, even the Son of God, manifesting himself to Abraham as he did to Moses, and Joshua, and others of the Old Testament saints. This opinion is founded on a literal interpretation of the apostle's language, in which he says of Melchizedek, that "he was without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life." But such an interpretation is not only unnecessary, but inadmissible, inasmuch as it would render the whole meaning of the apostle nugatory and inconclusive; for if Melchizedek were a divine person, even the Eternal Word himself, why should the apostle have laboured to show that he was greater than Aaron? or what force would there have been in the conclusion that Christ was made a high priest after the order of Melchizedek,—that is, after the order of himself? It were just to make the apostle appear to establish by a long argument the superiority of Christ's priesthood to that of Aaron, while, in reality, he was assuming it or taking it for granted. There can be no doubt, therefore, from what is here said, as well as from all that is stated by the apostle, that Melchizedek was a mere man, and that the silence of the inspired writer concerning his birth, parentage, and general history, was intentional, that the remarkable individual referred to might be held up to the Church in subsequent times as one of the most illustrious types of Christ in his priestly office. And, accordingly, the apostle represents him as occupying a

place of honour and distinction which no family descent could have conferred, and to which no earthly grandeur could have added any thing; for the very name which he bore signified the "king of righteousness," and the place where he resided intimated that he was the "king of peace." "Now consider," adds the apostle, "how great this man was, unto whom even the patriarch Abraham gave the tenth of the spoils."

But another question naturally occurs on reading the passage before us, namely, Where did Melchizedek reside, and over what portion of the inhabitants of Canaan did he bear rule, at the same time exercising among them the office of a priest? On this subject, also, the sacred historian is silent, in this respect, at least, that no direct information on it is here given us. Nor is much to be gathered from what is elsewhere recorded of the state of Canaan at the period here referred to. We would naturally conclude, however, from what is said, that the worshippers of the true God were comparatively few in number, and that whatever might be the extent of Melchizedek's dominion as an earthly prince, the sacredness of his character as priest of the Most High God was not recognised and acknowledged by any very large portion of the inhabitants of the land. Had the subjects of his temporal authority, though not very numerous, been generally professors of the true religion, as taught and exemplified by Melchizedek, they would have been so distinguished from the other nations around them, and must have constituted so large a proportion of the true Church of Christ, that we can hardly suppose they would have been passed over without notice by the sacred historian. But they are so passed over; and if, in the days of Abraham, they did form a Church in which Melchizedek officiated as priest, they must have gradually fallen away, and, like the surrounding nations, sunk into idolatry; for when the descendants of the patriarch came to take possession of the land promised unto their fathers, there does not appear to have been the vestige of any thing like a Church, such as we might suppose to have existed in the days of Melchizedek.

From all this we may infer, I think, that Melchizedek was appointed priest of the Most High God, not for the purpose of ministering among a certain number who were outwardly separated from the rest of the world, forming a distinct people under the government of a righteous king, and constituting a visible

Church, but for the purpose of proclaiming to all, whether they would hear or whether they would forbear, not only that the God whom he worshipped, and to whose service he had been appointed, was the only living and true God, but that there was a way by which they might be reconciled to him, even by the blood of Atonement. We can easily conceive that as Abraham was called to sojourn in a land of strangers, and under the shelter of the promise, "I will bless thee and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing; and I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee,"—we can easily conceive, I say, that as Abraham, under the shelter of this blessing, was preserved, and provided for, and prospered; so, in like manner, by a call equally direct and extraordinary, Melchizedek, whatever was his country, or kindred, or condition, might be appointed priest of the Most High God, and might be preserved and sustained in all the dignity of his office, not by outward and worldly influence, but by that unseen agency of God which exercises a most holy, and wise, and powerful control over all his creatures, and over all their actions.

By what outward and visible marks of the divine favour Melchizedek was distinguished we are not told; and therefore it becomes not us to conjecture. But of this we may be assured, that though there had not been a single true believer among his subjects, nor a single individual converted to God by his instrumentality, he would not only be preserved in safety so long as God had any purpose to fulfil by him, but he would be maintained in that state of dignity, and power, and honour, which was necessary to show that he was under the immediate care and keeping of the God whom he served. To account, therefore, for his occupying the high and honourable place of a temporal sovereign, possessing both wealth and authority, it is not necessary to suppose that he ruled over a godly people, the worshippers of the true God. The sacred writers have been careful to separate his dignity and greatness from every worldly consideration, and to place them entirely to the account of an express appointment of God. His selection, therefore, to the office of the priesthood was as much an immediate divine interposition as was the call of Abraham, and formed a part of that glorious plan for the salvation of the Church to which all the divine dispensations from the beginning were made subservient. It would appear

that previously to the time here spoken of, sacrifices were offered by true believers either individually or as families; in the latter case, the father or first-born, in all probability, acting as priest. But Melchizedek was, by the immediate appointment of God, ordained a priest for the Church at large for all who might avail themselves of the divine ordinance; and in that capacity he typified, and set forth more clearly than it had ever before been, the priestly office of Him who was one day to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.

The history of Melchizedek, then, short though it be, and but little calculated to gratify mere curiosity, furnishes one among the many proofs to be found in the Bible, that the great object of all the divine communications which were vouchsafed to men, even from the beginning, was to set forth to the faith of the Church, the person, and character, and work of Christ. And whether we consider what is said of Melchizedek personally,—or the period at which he lived,—or the special occasion on which he is brought into notice,—we cannot fail to perceive that he was one of the most illustrious of those types by which God was graciously pleased to keep alive the faith and hope of his people under the Old Testament dispensation, and by which he still continues to instruct and edify them under the New. As to himself personally, it is here simply said that his name was Melchizedek. But it is a name full of meaning, signifying, as we have already seen, "king of righteousness." Nor is this a fanciful application of the mere meaning of a word from which to draw an unauthorised conclusion. We have the authority of an inspired apostle for saying, if not that it was given to him by divine appointment, at least that it was divinely recognised as descriptive of the character of the individual; for the apostle tells us that he was first, or in the first place, that is in reference to his own name, because the name of his kingdom or residence was immediately to follow, as descriptive also of his character and office,—that he was first king of righteousness, intimating, as I understand it, not merely that he was a prince who ruled righteously and decreed justice, but that, being the priest of the Most High God, as well as the king of righteousness, he typically set forth the great truth that there is pardon for the guilty in perfect consistency with the most rigorous demands of divine rectitude and justice. And this interpretation is confirmed by

what is immediately added, both in the passage we are considering, and in the apostle's commentary upon it. In the former, it is said that Melchizedek, or king of righteousness, was king of Salem; and in the latter, by the apostle, that this Melchizedek was first, according to his name, "king of righteousness," and after that king of Salem, which is "king of peace." With regard to this title, different opinions have been entertained. Some have supposed that Salem was not the name of a place, but simply a title of Melchizedek, implying, as the apostle says it did, that he was "king of peace,"—"peace" being the literal signification of Salem. But the passage we are now considering, which is purely historical, and is not, therefore, to be figuratively rendered, except in so far as other inspired writers have so interpreted it, plainly intimates, I think, that Salem was the residence, if not the kingdom of Melchizedek. Now, there were two places in the land of Canaan to which this name may be supposed to refer, and various arguments have been employed in favour of each to show that it was the place here referred to. But I am inclined strongly towards the opinion of those who think that Jerusalem was the place where Melchizedek resided and reigned. That an addition was afterwards made to the name Salem is no argument against this interpretation,—nay, it is, I think, an argument in its favour. The simple word Salem signifies "peace,"—the compound word Jerusalem signifies "vision of peace;" and what could more emphatically describe the habitation of him who was the brightest and most illustrious type of Christ in his priestly office, as making peace between God and man, and the place, moreover, where, in after times, God was to take up his abode, manifesting himself in a way of grace and mercy, speaking peace to his people, and accepting their sacrifices and burnt-offerings?

And that Salem should afterwards be called Jerusalem, or "vision of peace," in reference to its having been the dwelling-place of Melchizedek, was most appropriate, inasmuch as his residence there was, as it were, an intimation of the many glorious discoveries which, in subsequent times, were to be made in the same place, respecting the grace and mercy of God towards his church and people. And in accordance with this is the language of the prophets, who speak of Jerusalem as the place where peace was to be found, and from which peace was to go forth and be proclaimed to the whole world. The prophet Haggai, speaking of

the second temple, and of the glory with which it was to be filled by the presence of Christ, the true Shekinah, "the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person," says, "The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the Lord of hosts; and in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of hosts." In like manner, the prophet Zechariah foretells the glory of Christ and his mediatorial work, as at once a King and a Priest, which it is almost impossible, I think, to read without being reminded of Melchizedek as the "king of righteousness," and also the "king of peace," when he says, "Behold the man whose name is The Branch; and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of the Lord: even he shall build the temple of the Lord; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be a Priest upon his throne: and the counsel of peace shall be between them both." And, finally, one of the most explicit promises or predictions concerning Christ which is to be found in the Book of Psalms, is expressed in terms which are as applicable to Melchizedek as those in which he is described in the passage before us, or in the commentary of the apostle: "Surely his salvation is nigh them that fear him; that glory may dwell in our land. Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other."

Such was the very close resemblance between Melchizedek the type, and Christ the great Antitype, whom he was raised up and appointed to represent or prefigure. And surely no devout man can contemplate the character of Melchizedek, as it is here briefly described, without feelings of admiration and gratitude for the grace and wisdom of God in thus making the history, even of the earliest of his dealings with the Church, bear testimony to the all-sufficiency of Him through whose finished work God is revealed to sinners as the just God and yet the Saviour, as just even in justifying the ungodly. But the same grace and wisdom are not less strikingly displayed in the circumstances in which Melchizedek lived. Previously to that period, as we find from the preceding chapters of this book, various means had been employed with mankind to preserve among them the faith and the remembrance of the two great truths which it did most nearly concern them to know and believe,—first, that they had incurred death as the penalty of sin,—and, second, that the seed of the

woman was to destroy the power of him who had subjected them to this penalty, and so deliver them from the infliction of it. These experiments, however, had proved that men did not like to retain God in their knowledge; and the time was come when he was, in righteous retribution, to give them up for a season to the darkness which they had deliberately chosen, and in which they were obstinately determined to remain. He however selected, from amidst the almost universal idolatry of the world, one individual, Abraham, in whose family he purposed to preserve the knowledge and worship of Himself, and provide that at no period should there be wanting at least a remnant, to constitute a true Church, and to be at last a reward to Him who was to purchase them with his own blood, and in their salvation was to see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied. Abraham was accordingly commanded to go to the land of Canaan, concerning which he was assured that it was to be given to him, and to his seed after him, for an everlasting inheritance. But though it was thus secured to him by a grant which could never be revoked, and by a security as infallible as the oath of the omnipotent and unchangeable God could make it, he was, during his whole life, and his children for generations after him, to be mere sojourners there,—witnesses for God and preachers of righteousness to the sinful inhabitants, whose growing wickedness and final destruction were foreseen and foretold. To this state of pilgrimage Abraham cheerfully submitted, and to this duty of witnessing for God he actively devoted himself,—everywhere proclaiming and asserting the sovereignty of God, and testifying, both by his words and his example, those great truths, the tendency of which, if they had been believed and embraced, was to avert the very judgments by which his posterity were to be put in possession of the land. And that no selfish motive actuated Abraham was abundantly evident from the whole tenor of his life; for it is perfectly plain, I think, that nothing could have delighted him more, than to have seen the whole inhabitants of Canaan turn unto God by penitence and faith, whatever had become of the temporal possession of his posterity.

But if there were any doubt on this point, it is removed by his marvellous intercession on behalf of Sodom, wherein he manifested an anxiety, an agony of earnestness, for the preservation of its unhappy inhabitants, which none but those who have con-

ceived somewhat of the terrible nature of the divine displeasure, and the blessedness of enjoying the divine favour, can sympathise with or understand. In this way, then, as well as by the marvellous prosperity which accompanied him, and the still more marvellous power with which he was armed when he went forth against the victorious kings of the east, he asserted and testified for the sovereignty of the living God, with a clearness of demonstration which none, it might be supposed, could gainsay or resist. But how much clearer, then, and more irresistible, must his testimony have been when it was united with that of Melchizedek? Whatever was Melchizedek's origin, or in whatever way he was elevated to the place in which Abraham found him, we cannot doubt that his history did as plainly intimate as the patriarch's own did, the presence and the operation of a divine power, protecting, sustaining, and prospering him; and whatever might be the number of those over whom he ruled, and among whom he exercised his office as a priest, his ministrations must have been such as could not fail to arrest the attention, at least, if they did not command the reverence of the inhabitants of Canaan. And what, then, could be conceived more solemn and impressive, as a testimony to the sovereignty of the one only living and true God, than the transaction between Melchizedek and Abraham? It would appear that the king of Sodom was present at that singular interview, and that at all events he did immediately after it tender to the patriarch a reward, or at least an expression of his gratitude, for the signal service which had been rendered to him. To this offer Abraham gave a very distinct and solemn refusal. But while he assumed, in the presence of the king of Sodom, the lofty and dignified bearing which became him as the servant of the King of kings, who had been honoured with a special call to show, not only to the men of that time, but to every subsequent age of the world, how unreservedly and unhesitatingly he could take the word of God as his portion, his conduct in the presence of Melchizedek was not less striking, as a reverential acknowledgment of the divine authority in the person of him who was the priest of the Most High God; for he not only paid to Melchizedek the tithe of the spoils which he had taken, but with all humility received refreshment and a blessing at his hand. "And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the Most High

God. And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the Most High God, possessor of heaven and earth; and blessed be the Most High God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thine hand. And he gave him tithes of all." Well, indeed, might the Canaanites have said, "Of a truth these men are the servants of the Most High God;" and when we consider the character and the predicted end of the people among whom God made this glorious manifestation both of his righteousness and his mercy, well may we say, in profound admiration of the forbearance, compassion, and long-suffering patience of God, "His ways are not our ways, neither are his thoughts our thoughts; for as the heavens are high above the earth, so are God's ways above our ways, and his thoughts above our thoughts."

But however weak or transient might be the effect of this transaction on those who witnessed it, we cannot doubt that it was rich in consolation and instruction to the patriarch himself, and to his spiritual seed in all after-times, for whose encouragement and comfort it was obviously intended. As a sojourner in Canaan, it must have afforded him unspeakable consolation to find there, what he had perhaps never looked for, a worshipper of the true God, and one, moreover, who had been invested with special honour and authority for God's service. But it was, without doubt, as a type of Christ that Abraham looked with special interest to the character and office of Melchizedek,—and it was as a pledge of the final victory of the Church of Christ, when all the families of the earth should be blessed in Him, that he chiefly valued Melchizedek's blessing. With the office of a priest, as it concerned the offering of sacrifice, Abraham must have been perfectly familiar, inasmuch as from the beginning this office appears to have been executed by one in every family of the Church. Abel, we know, sacrificed of the firstlings of his flocks. Noah, in like manner, on coming forth of the ark, offered unto the Lord of every clean beast. And of Abraham himself it is testified, that wherever he went he built an altar and called on the name of the Lord. But Melchizedek was a priest as none before him had ever been; and in his person and office Abraham must have seen more of Christ and his work than he had ever before seen. The circumstances, too, in which he met Melchizedek and received his blessing, were of a very interesting and instructive kind; and though we cannot deter-

mine how far he was enabled to understand them, they cannot but be full of meaning now to every devout and careful reader of the Bible. On this most interesting subject, I would borrow the language of an eminent divine. "As Melchizedek," says he, "represented Christ, so Abraham, in his battle and victory, was a type of all believers in their warfare and conflict with all their spiritual adversaries. Wherefore, as he and all his were refreshed by the kingly bounty of Melchizedek, so shall they be, in all their duties and difficulties, from the munificence and riches of Jesus Christ." "All the commotions and concussions that are among the nations of the world, do lie in, or shall be brought into, a subserviency unto the interest of Christ and his Church. A great war and tumult there was between these eastern kings, whom Abraham defeated, and those of Canaan; and many nations were smitten and destroyed in the expedition. And what is the final issue whereunto all these things do come? Why, two things fall out hereon that neither side of the combatants either looked for, or had any interest in. First, the victory of Abraham or the Church over them all. And, second, a glorious type or representation of Christ brought forth, visibly acting in his Church. This issue did God direct that war and tumult unto. It will be no otherwise with all those confusions and disorders that the world is filled withal at this day, though we can see nothing of the ways and means of their tendency unto such an end. And then, this congress of Melchizedek and Abraham, after Abraham had gotten the victory over all his adversaries, was a type and representation of the glorious congress and meeting of Christ and the Church at the last day, when the whole Church shall have finished its warfare, and be victorious over the world, sin, the law, death, and hell. Then will the Lord Christ bring out the stores of heaven for their eternal refreshment, and give them in the fulness of the blessing, and all things shall issue in the glory of the Most High God."

And does not the Church collectively, as well as every individual member, at the present day, stand as much in need as ever of the comfort and encouragement held out by considerations like these? for what would believers do amidst the toils, and troubles, and manifold ills of this present life, this weary pilgrimage, if their Melchizedek, their great High Priest, their Advocate with the Father, were not daily procuring for them and

imparting to them consolation and support, by the communications of his grace, and the exceeding great and precious promises of his Word? And if Christians take any interest in the extension and establishment of Christ's kingdom, (and what Christian does not?) is there not enough in the state of the world to depress at times, and greatly to discourage them with regard to the prospects of that kingdom? Generation after generation is passing away, and still the progress of the truth is but slow among those who know it not,—while in lands where it has been longest known, it is often doubtful whether it be advancing,—if indeed it be not certainly and obviously losing ground. And what in such circumstances can sustain the spirits, and revive the hopes, and call forth the renewed prayers and efforts of believers, but the recollection that the Scriptures do everywhere, and in every possible way,—by direct promise, by typical representation, and by prophetical events,—foretell as a thing infallibly certain, that the kingdoms of this world must become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ? Let us then see to it, that this kingdom has been established and is advancing in our own souls, as the reign of righteousness, and of peace, and of joy in the Holy Ghost,—that we are growing in preparedness for any struggle which may yet await the Church even in our own times,—and above all, that we are growing in meetness for the glorious manifestation of Christ at the last day, so that "we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming." And in proportion as we experience the faithfulness of his promises in our own victory over the devil, and the world, and the flesh, the more firmly shall we confide in, and the more eagerly will we look for, the fulfilment of his promises also respecting the final triumph of his Church, when he shall take to him his great power and reign,—when his dominion shall extend from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth.

X.

THE INTERCESSION FOR SODOM.

GENESIS XVIII. 20-33.

It is said in the first verse of this chapter that "the Lord appeared unto Abraham in the plains of Mamre;" and then the sacred historian goes on to describe the manner of this appearance. Abraham, we are told, "sat in the tent-door in the cool of the day; and he lift up his eyes and looked, and, lo, three men stood by him: and when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent-door, and bowed himself toward the ground, and said, My Lord, if now I have found favour in thy sight, pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant."

Before proceeding farther in the narrative, we are naturally led, I think, to conclude that of these three men, as they appeared to Abraham to be, one was a Divine Person; and this conclusion seems to be placed beyond all doubt by the manner in which the remarkable interview with the patriarch is subsequently described. Though it is plainly intimated that the three were present during a considerable part of the interview, yet Abraham is represented as addressing one individual, and is himself addressed in the same way. The patriarch's first salutation was, "My Lord, if now I have found favour in thy sight;" and though he immediately afterwards addresses the three, and is himself addressed by them, the converse is mainly carried on between him and one, and that one is not only called the Lord, but represented as assuming that glorious title. "The Lord," we

are told, "said unto Abraham, Wherefore did Sarah laugh? Is any thing too hard for the Lord? At the time appointed I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son." At the 16th verse it is said that "the men," the three whom Abraham had entertained, "rose up from thence, and looked," or set their faces, "toward Sodom: and Abraham went with them to bring them on the way." But still it was one, even the Lord, who spoke of and to the patriarch: for it is immediately added, "And the Lord said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do; seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? for I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him." Whether this was expressed in words in the hearing of Abraham, or whether it is a representation of the purposes of the divine mind, it is not necessary to determine.

Of the immediately following statement there can be no doubt. "The Lord said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous; I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me; and if not, I will know." This was plainly spoken to Abraham by one, and that in the presence of the two others. And it appears that immediately upon this, a separation took place,—two of the persons going towards Sodom, and the third, who is called the Lord, remaining still in converse with the patriarch: for it is added, "And the men turned their faces from thence, and went toward Sodom: but Abraham stood yet before the Lord."

Accordingly, throughout the remainder of the chapter, certainly one of the most remarkable passages of Scripture, the interview is between the Lord and Abraham,—but introduced in such a way as plainly to imply that the person with whom Abraham was honoured to hold converse, was one of the three who are represented in the beginning of the chapter as standing by him at his tent-door. And as if to place this truth beyond all doubt, we are told, at the commencement of the following chapter, that there came two angels to Sodom at even; plainly

intimating, as I think, that they were two of the three whom Abraham had gone with to bring them on the way,—the third having remained to reveal to the patriarch the divine purposes concerning Sodom. I conclude, therefore, that the glorious person who deigned to hold such a marvellous interview with Abraham was no other than the Eternal Word, the Second Person of the adorable Trinity, the Brightness of the Father's glory, and the express Image of his Person,—He who afterwards wrestled with Jacob as an angel,—the "Angel which redeemed him from all evil,"—He who appeared to Moses in the burning bush,—He who, as the Angel of the Covenant, conducted Israel through the wilderness, not only guiding but keeping them in the way,—He who met Joshua by Jericho, as the Captain of the Lord's host,—and who was manifested in the Shekinah, or cloud of glory, both in the tabernacle in the wilderness, and in the temple on Mount Moriah at Jerusalem. And if it be asked how Abraham could discover this divine person, or distinguish him from the two who accompanied him, I would reply, that there can be nothing wonderful in such a discovery on the part of Abraham, the father of the faithful, and the friend of God, when we remember that a similar discovery was made at a subsequent period to a heathen prince,—even to Nebuchadnezzar, the oppressor of God's people, when, after commanding the three Jews to be cast into the burning fiery furnace, he was constrained to cry out to his counsellors, "Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt, and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God."

I cannot see any reason to doubt that, in all the cases to which I have referred, Christ was the person who appeared. To Him was committed, from the beginning, the administration of the affairs of his Church; and though that administration was ordinarily carried on through the instrumentality of servants appointed and qualified by himself, it were easy to show from the Scriptures that he did on special occasions make himself manifest, as the Angel of God's covenant, the Captain of the Lord's host. And on no occasion was the appearance of a divine person more in accordance with the character of the Redeemer than in the case before us; for on no occasion have we a more affecting display of the divine condescension, and compassion,

and mercy, than in the communication here made to Abraham. The transaction was equally illustrative of the marvellous grace and goodness of the Lord, whether we view it in reference to the patriarch, or consider it as it regarded the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the other cities of the plain. With respect to Abraham, there was conferred upon him by that transaction an honour and a distinction which could not fail to awaken in his soul feelings of the deepest humility as well as of the warmest admiration. "The Lord said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?" Extraordinary language this to be used by the Most High God, respecting one of his fallen and sinful creatures,—language which places in a most marvellous light not only the divine condescension, but the honour, and dignity, and blessedness to which it is the gracious purpose of God to exalt his believing people,—admitting them to the most intimate fellowship with himself,—even making known to them, on befitting occasions, the unsearchable counsels of his will.

Reasons, indeed, are assigned for the remarkable manifestation of the divine condescension to Abraham, recorded in the passage before us. The patriarch was to become a great nation, as well as to be a blessing to all the other nations of the earth; and it was important, both for the manifestation of the divine glory and for the instruction of all future generations, that the history of God's procedure towards Sodom should be preserved, and the principle of that procedure fully and clearly expounded. Abraham, moreover, had been, and would continue to be, faithful and diligent in commanding his children and household after him; and to none, therefore, could be more appropriately committed the honourable and responsible charge of preserving the knowledge of God's righteous judgment, and inculcating the holy lessons which that judgment was fitted and designed to teach. But the qualifications which Abraham thus possessed, above all men of his time, for being the depository of the divine counsels, and the faithful instructor of his posterity in the history of the divine dispensations, serve only to exhibit more clearly and fully the unmerited goodness and condescension of God,—inasmuch as these qualifications were themselves God's free gift. If Abraham was to become a great nation, and if in him all the families of the earth were to be blessed, it was because God in his

sovereign grace had called him, when he was about to fall, if, indeed, he had not fallen, into idolatry, and by solemn covenant had pledged his faithfulness and his truth, that in the patriarch's family should be fulfilled all that God had revealed or purposed respecting the promised Redeemer. And if Abraham was faithful in so commanding his children and household that they kept the way of the Lord to do justice and judgment, it was because, by divine grace, he had been quickened and strengthened so to labour, and by the divine blessing his labours were to be crowned with success. And such is God's method of dealing still. It is altogether of His free grace that any one of the sinful children of men is ever brought into a covenant relation to Him. But, being brought into that relation, their work of faith and their labour of love is rewarded, as if it were their own, with still larger communications of grace,—"for whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance,"—and though immediate and miraculous communications, like that given to Abraham, are no longer vouchsafed or needed, it is still true, in respect of the communication of light, and life, and heavenly consolation, by the teaching of the Holy Spirit, that "the secret of the Lord is with them that fear him, and he will show them his covenant."

But the transaction here recorded is deeply interesting, as placing in a very affecting point of view the divine forbearance and long-suffering patience towards even the guiltiest and most hopelessly depraved of the children of men. "And the Lord said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous; I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me; and if not, I will know." This language, of course, cannot be understood as meaning that there was or could be any imperfection in the divine knowledge, or any uncertainty in the divine purpose; as if He did not know the extent of the guilt of Sodom, or did not foresee in what that guilt was to terminate. To Him who searches the heart and tries the reins of the children of men,—who knows their very thoughts afar off,—and whose eyes are in every place, beholding the evil and the good,—there could be no doubt or uncertainty as to the true character of the inhabitants of Sodom and

Gomorrah, and no hesitation as to how it was befitting Him to act. But in accommodation to the weakness of His servant, he spoke to him after the manner of men; and, in doing so, declared, in the most emphatic manner, that if judgment was executed upon the cities of the plain, it was because the cry of their iniquity was so loud, and their sin so grievous, that they could no longer be endured, consistently with the rectitude of the divine government. But as if to satisfy Abraham on this point, and to convince him that judgment was the Lord's strange work, and that he delighted in mercy, he declared that, before proceeding to that work, "He would go down and see whether they had done altogether according to the cry of it which had come unto him;" "and if not," he adds, "I will know."

The expression "if not" does not imply, as I have already remarked, that the omniscient God either did or could doubt as to the sin of Sodom. But it did plainly intimate, and Abraham must have understood it as intimating, that God had endured, or would endure to the very uttermost of what was befitting his character as the righteous Lawgiver and Judge, and of what was consistent with the vindication of the honour and rectitude of his government. Nay, if I might venture to express the idea in any other words than those of Inspiration, the language would be to Abraham like a declaration that God would willingly have discovered some ground or reason for turning from his anger, and repenting him of the evil which he thought to bring on these guilty and devoted cities. "I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me; and if not, I will know." And that Abraham did put some such interpretation on the remarkable words which had been addressed to him appears to me very evident from what is recorded in the subsequent verses of the chapter. Nothing but an expression of compassion and mercy on the part of God could have emboldened Abraham to speak as he did, —to plead so earnestly for a place concerning which God himself had said, its cry is great, and its sin is very grievous,—and to persevere moreover in his plea, and carry it to such a length as almost to fill one not only with awe, but with fear in reading it. I cannot doubt, indeed, that it was God's gracious purpose, in speaking to Abraham as he did, to encourage his servant so

to plead on behalf of Sodom,—to invite him as it were to produce his arguments,—and to urge every thing which love to his fellow-men might dictate, in so far as it was becoming a sinful creature to speak, and befitting the Almighty God, the Judge of all the earth, to hear. And I need not remark that Abraham eagerly availed himself of this permission; and not only commenced his plea with a very bold question,—virtually expressing a doubt whether, if there were a given number of righteous persons in the city of Sodom, it were consistent with the divine rectitude to destroy the city, or at least to involve the righteous in the ruin of the wicked,—but continued to repeat his question, with great reverence indeed, but at the same time with great confidence, till he received such assurances of the divine forbearance and long-suffering as forbade him farther to deprecate the execution of God's righteous judgment.

It were vain to attempt conceiving, at least to attempt expressing our conception of, what Abraham must have felt at the conclusion of this most wonderful interview, when we are told that "the Lord went his way, as soon as he had left communing with Abraham: and Abraham returned unto his place." But this much we may freely say, that the interview here recorded is one of the most encouraging to humble, simple-hearted, and devout believers, that is to be found in the Scriptures, to avail themselves of the privilege of prayer. Let not such persons think that they cannot approach God as Abraham did. Abraham was a man of like passions with themselves. In himself he had no more right than they have to reason and remonstrate with God. He was a sinner, and he was called by the grace of God to be a saint. In this his new relation to God he availed himself of the privilege which God had freely given him, being guided in his use of that privilege by the revealed will of Him to whom he prayed. But is it not the privilege of every true believer, the revealed will of God to him, to come boldly to the throne of grace, and with filial confidence to make known his wants by supplication and prayer? Believers now, indeed, are not made acquainted with the secret purposes of God, as Abraham was, nor consulted, so to speak, upon any given divine purpose, such as that of destroying Sodom of old. But the example of Abraham has been recorded for the encouragement of believers in all

subsequent times; and it assures them that if they are actuated, as Abraham was, by a supreme regard to the honour and glory of God, and by unfeigned love to men, they are warranted to come to the throne of grace, and to plead according to the warrant given them in the Bible, with the same earnestness and urgency which the patriarch employed when he prayed for God's sparing mercy to Sodom. The object of their prayer, as in the case of Abraham, may not be granted. But their prayer will return into their own bosom; and while, like the patriarch, they will recognise and acknowledge the divine rectitude, even in withholding from them their requests, they will leave the footstool of their Father's throne with the consciousness that by his grace they had cherished and expressed feelings which were in accordance with his will, and well-pleasing in his sight.

But I have still something more to say about the forbearance and long-suffering patience of God towards the guilty cities of the plain, as these are manifested in the interview with Abraham. I have already remarked that when God said to the patriarch, "I will go down now, and see whether Sodom and Gomorrah have done altogether according to the cry which is come unto me; and if not, I will know," He gave Abraham an opening for interference,—a hint, as it were, to prefer his petition on behalf of his guilty and condemned fellow-creatures. I have also observed that Abraham gladly and eagerly availed himself of this permission, and began by appealing, not to the mercy, but to the very rectitude of God, saying, "Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked? Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city: wilt thou also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that are therein? That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee: shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

It may appear, at first sight, as if Abraham meant to assert that it was not consistent with the justice and rectitude of God that any righteous person should be involved in temporal calamities, merely because such a person happened to be living in an ungodly and profligate community; and that this was the strength of his plea on behalf of Sodom. But though his language in the words now quoted might seem to imply this, it is

plain from the general tenor, and especially from the conclusion of his prayer, that he did not mean to plead for the preservation of Sodom, or even for the deliverance of the righteous that might be found therein, on the ground that it was inconsistent with the justice of God to destroy the place if such righteous persons were really to be found there. It is for the sparing, the unmerited mercy of God towards the inhabitants generally, that he earnestly pleads,—not on the ground that the righteous were entitled to exemption, but on the ground that God in his kindness towards them might extend or protract his mercy towards the ungodly and impenitent. And this the patriarch virtually acknowledges in the conclusion of his bold, his most marvellous address to God. He was assured that if ten righteous persons were found in Sodom, Sodom should not be destroyed; and with this declaration he was silenced. He ventured not to prefer another request. For any thing he knew, there might be nine righteous persons in Sodom; yet Sodom might be destroyed, and these nine might perish in the destruction. But he did not dispute the rectitude of such a procedure; nor did he appeal to the justice of God, as if such a judgment were inconsistent with that justice. His plea, then, from the beginning and throughout, was addressed to the mercy of God, and to his grace and kindness towards his own people,—in the hope that for their sake, if there were any such, he might be graciously pleased to delay, at least for some time longer, the execution of his righteous judgment on the ungodly and impenitent. And how efficacious this plea was is abundantly evident from the gracious replies which the patriarch received, as he proceeded to prefer in succession his bold requests. How he ventured at first to fix on fifty righteous persons as sufficient to ward off from Sodom the threatened judgment, I know not, and cannot even hazard a conjecture. But such was the patriarch's plea, and it was sustained. "If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes." Encouraged by this answer, yet as if amazed at his own boldness and freedom, he renews his question with an acknowledgment of his unworthiness, but, at the same time, with the appearance of all the skill and address which he might have been supposed to employ if he had been remonstrating with a fellow-creature. "Behold now,

I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes: peradventure there shall lack five of the fifty righteous." He does not say, Peradventure there be found forty and five, wilt thou not spare the place for the forty and five righteous that are therein? He had got the assurance that fifty would save it. He does not, however, venture to plead directly for forty-five; but he says, putting his question in the form in which it might be supposed to be most persuasive if addressed to a man like himself, "Peradventure there shall lack five of the fifty righteous persons, wilt thou destroy all the city for lack of five?" The patriarch did not and could not suppose that the great God whom he addressed, the Holy and Righteous Lawgiver, could be influenced by any skill or wisdom of his in the manner of preferring his plea. But that manner, which I would call skilful if he had been pleading with a man like himself, bears witness to the intense earnestness of Abraham's soul in the prayer which he presented. He was, as it were, thinking aloud, —as if he had said to himself, The Lord has graciously said that he will not destroy Sodom if there be found fifty righteous persons there, and surely, then, he will spare it though there should lack five of the fifty.

Such, it is obvious, was the patriarch's train of thought, and with a holy fervour, equalled only by its childlike simplicity, he gave utterance to his thoughts, "Wilt thou destroy all the city for lack of five?" To this petition also he received a gracious answer, "If I find there forty and five, I will not destroy it." And so he was answered to all his other petitions, till, as I have already observed, he was assured that if even ten righteous persons were found in Sodom, God would spare it for the ten's sake. With this reply Abraham was satisfied. The divine forbearance and long-suffering had been carried as far as the patriarch could expect, or durst pray for. He could not forget that he was holding converse with Him who was not only the God of mercy, but the God of truth and rectitude,—righteous in all his ways and holy in all his works,—and who could not therefore pass by or overlook from mere pity, that rebellion of his creatures which, if unpunished or unchecked, would involve the whole of his moral government in disorder and ruin. Nay, the patriarch must have felt that the very mercy and forbearance

which God had already exercised, and was still willing to exercise, gave unspeakable solemnity and terror to his judgments, inasmuch as it thereby appeared that these judgments were absolutely necessary,—inflicted, not from any feeling of anger or revenge, against which the hardened and impenitent sinner might find a miserable gratification in rebelling, but in accordance with the principles of eternal truth and righteousness. This, in fact, will be the sharpest pang in the conscience of the finally impenitent hereafter, when they will be compelled to acknowledge that the sentence pronounced upon them is not the dictate of angry or vindictive feelings, but the righteous award of a holy Judge,—of Him who pleaded long and earnestly, but in vain, that they would turn unto him and live. Christ is that Judge. He is now revealed as a compassionate Saviour, entreating men that they will accept his salvation, and be reconciled to God through his blood,—the blood of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. But he will one day be revealed as the judge of the quick and of the dead; and will it not fearfully aggravate the misery and wretchedness of impenitent sinners to find, that sentence of everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power, is pronounced upon them by Him whose gracious invitations and whose compassionate remonstrances had failed to win them over from sin and Satan to God and holiness? The contrast between the character of Christ as the meek and lowly Jesus, the Man of sorrows, the Saviour who wept over the impenitence and unbelief of Jerusalem of old, and his character as the Judge of all, coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory, will assuredly, to the ungodly, give unspeakable terrors to the solemnities of the judgment-seat: for of all the expressions to be found in the Bible in reference to that great event, the most terrific, in my apprehension, is that which represents impenitent sinners as saying "to the mountains and to the rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth upon the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb."

I have already, in the course of these remarks, adverted to some of the practical lessons which the remarkable passage before us is fitted to suggest; and I doubt not that the attentive reader, to whom the passage is familiar, as the frequent subject

of devout thought and admiration, has discovered many more than I have referred to. I would still, however, in a few words, notice one or two others of the many reflections which can hardly fail to occur on a careful perusal of these verses. And in the first place, I would observe, that in the transaction here recorded, we have a very plain and intelligible example of God's manner of acting in his government of the world, in so far as the children of men are concerned. It is an example, indeed, of a miraculous interposition, preceded by a direct revelation of God's purpose so to interpose. But we are never to forget that the principles of the divine government are the same in all ages, though there is not in every age a Sodom to be destroyed by fire from heaven, nor an Abraham to whom the divine purpose of such a judgment is to be directly revealed. God can accomplish his designs, whether of judgment or of mercy, as infallibly, by the ordinary dispensations of his providence, as by an immediate and miraculous interposition ; and could we trace the endless variety of second causes which contribute to the fulfilment of any one of his purposes, we would see therein as bright a display of his infinite knowledge, his almighty power, his long-suffering patience, and his unchangeable rectitude, as ever was exhibited even in the most stupendous miracles which have been recorded in the Scriptures. And when, therefore, it is his pleasure to visit a nation or community with righteous judgment, he needs not to rain fire and brimstone from heaven to destroy it. There are elements enough in every community which require only to be set free from restraint to become the instruments of inflicting the heaviest judgments on a guilty people : and they who are familiar with the Bible, and are accustomed to recognise the hand of God in all events, need not any immediate revelation to warn them of the approach of such judgments. But, in the second place, the passage before us does very plainly declare why and on whose account it is that such judgments are often long delayed, if not entirely averted. Sodom was not destroyed until there were not ten righteous persons to be found in it. We certainly are not warranted to infer from this, that in all ages and in all circumstances, ten righteous persons will save an ungodly city or community from the righteous judgments of God. The guilt of communities, like that of

individuals, must be estimated by the blessings and the privileges which they enjoy; and ten righteous persons in Sodom might have implied a purer and holier state of society than a thousand such in a city or community like our own. This sentiment is warranted by our Lord's declaration concerning Capernaum, where many of his mighty works had been done, when he said, "It shall be more tolerable for Sodom in the day of judgment than for thee." We cannot, therefore, say that ten righteous persons will always save a city from the visitation of God's holy displeasure. But the passage before us does very plainly say, that for the sake and on account of the righteous, forbearance and long-suffering are exercised towards the impenitent and ungodly. Believers are indeed the salt of the earth. It is by their means that the tendency of the world to universal corruption is arrested or retarded; it is for their sake that seasons of tribulation and sorrow are frequently shortened; and it is on their account that many such calamities have been altogether averted. Little, therefore, do ungodly men and scoffers know how much, under God, they are indebted to those whom they despise and deride, and how often the judgments of God may have been averted from the community to which they belong, because of the righteous persons that have been found therein.

XI.

ISAAC AND ISHMAEL.

GENESIS XXI. 9,10.

THE circumstance here recorded marks a very interesting period, not only in the personal history of Abraham, but in the gradual revelation of the Covenant of Grace. The patriarch, at the time here referred to, had been a sojourner in the land of Canaan, and in the neighbouring countries, for upwards of twenty-five years; and during that period he had received many assurances of the divine favour, and had experienced many gracious interpositions of divine power. He had, more than once, been preserved from dangers, in the prospect of which his faith had so far failed him, that he betook himself to means of escape which ill became one to whom such great and precious promises had been made, and had been confirmed by so many solemn pledges. The Lord, moreover, had laid the fear of him and the dread of him on the nations round about, both near and at a distance; for not only was he preserved and prospered amidst the abounding iniquity of Canaan, but he was strengthened to defeat the allied forces of the kings of the east, who had carried away captive the people of Sodom. Of him and his household, as well as of his posterity, it might well be said in the beautiful language of the Psalmist, "When they went from one nation to another, from one kingdom to another people, the Lord suffered no man to do them wrong: yea, he reproved kings for their sakes; saying, Touch not mine anointed, and do

my prophets no harm." And besides thus throwing over the patriarch the shield of his protecting power, God had condescended to make to him such communications of his will as plainly intimated that all the divine dealings with the nations, whether of mercy or of judgment, had a reference to the interests of Abraham and his family; for not only did he make known to his servant his purpose of destroying Sodom, but he condescended so to explain the principle on which he acted, as plainly to declare that the judgment would not be executed till Abraham was satisfied that the divine forbearance could not consistently be carried farther.

All these marvellous proofs and tokens of the divine favour Abraham had received. But up to a very short time before the period referred to in the verses under consideration, he had not received the fulfilment of the great promise, from which every other blessing which he enjoyed derived all its value,—namely, the promise of a son in whom all the families of the earth were to be blessed. He had, indeed, a son; for Ishmael was born thirteen years before the time of which we are speaking. But Abraham had been told in the most express terms that the promise was not to be fulfilled in Ishmael; and the patriarch, therefore, had been required from year to year to hope against hope, that he was to be the father of a great nation. The promise, however, was at length fulfilled. Isaac was born, and Abraham could no longer be in any doubt as to that child being the heir of the promises. But, as if to remove all possibility of any such doubt or uncertainty, events were so overruled as to cut off all pretensions on the part of Ishmael to be reckoned Abraham's heir.—"Sarah said unto Abraham, Cast out this bond-woman and her son: for the son of this bond-woman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac."

These words, taken in connection with the preceding verse, may appear at first sight to have been dictated merely by a feeling of irritation on the part of Sarah. It is said in the ninth verse, "And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, which she had born unto Abraham, mocking." And then it is added, "Wherefore she said unto Abraham, Cast out this bond-woman and her son." This, no doubt, was very like the language of wounded pride; and I do not say that there was not

some such feeling in Sarah's mind. She was the mother of the child concerning whom God had once and again said, in the plainest and most express terms, "With him shall my covenant be established." In her impatience and unbelief she had been instrumental in bringing upon herself and her child the derision and reproach which she felt to be so painful; and it would not have been wonderful if, in the midst of her joy on the birth and promising growth of Isaac, she should have been not only wounded, but irritated by the insolent demeanour of one whom she could not regard otherwise than, in some respects, as a rival to her only son. There were, however, other considerations which might account in part, if not wholly, for Sarah's apparently harsh speech. It had been foretold of Ishmael before he was born, by the Angel of the Lord, that he would be a wild man; that his hand would be against every man, and that every man's hand would be against him. At the time here referred to, he was at an age when his character might be, and, indeed, could not fail to be, so far formed and unfolded as to show that he was daring, wayward, and self-willed,—and at an age, moreover, when he was fully accountable for his conduct, and for the many holy lessons which had been taught him by the instructions, and which had been inculcated upon him by the example of his father. His mocking Isaac, therefore, who must still have been little advanced, if at all beyond the helplessness of infancy, indicated a temper and spirit which could not fail to alarm Sarah. She herself, as well as Abraham, was approaching extreme old age; and, according to all human probability, her infant son was soon to be left a friendless orphan in a land of strangers. And what could she expect, from what she witnessed of Ishmael's character and conduct, but that he was to prove the formidable rival, at least, if not the determined enemy and oppressor of her child,—one who would, by fraud or force, appropriate to himself the inheritance which belonged to Isaac?

It may be said, indeed, that whatever became of Isaac's temporal inheritance, nothing could rob him of his interest in the Covenant of Grace, or transfer to another the honour of being the father of that line in which the promised Saviour was one day to appear; and that Sarah, knowing all this, needed not to

show so much anxiety on the subject of Ishmael seeking to share with Isaac the worldly inheritance of his father Abraham. No doubt, all this is now very clear to us; and it is easy to say that it ought to have been equally clear to Sarah. But we must never forget, that to the Old Testament saints there must have appeared a very intimate, an almost inseparable connection between the temporal and the spiritual blessing. The connection was declared in the first promise to Abraham,—"I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: and I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed." The whole tenor of the divine dispensations towards Abraham and his posterity seemed to intimate that this connection between the promise of worldly prosperity and that of spiritual blessings was inseparable. And many instances might be produced, in the history of Old Testament saints, of such being the generally-received opinion. With the imperfect revelation, then, which Sarah had of the Covenant of Grace, and of the character and work of Him who was to seal that covenant with his blood, she might have felt as if the possession of the temporal inheritance was to determine the heirship of the spiritual; and, perceiving how little able Isaac would be to contend with the superior strength of the fierce and wayward Ishmael, there might have been in her mind a far deeper and more solemn feeling than that of a mother's wounded pride, on seeing her only child derided and mocked, when she said, "Cast out this bond-woman and her son: for the son of this bond-woman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac."

But whatever might be the feeling which was awakened in Sarah's mind on seeing Ishmael mocking, and which might immediately dictate the words which she addressed to Abraham, we know, for we have been assured by inspired authority, that she was directed by divine power to utter these words,—and that they are words of grave and solemn import. Whether she fully understood that import is a question which we cannot, and which, if we could, it is not necessary to determine. If she did not, it was nothing more than what took place in the case of the prophets, who did not always understand what, by the dictation

of the Holy Spirit, they spoke and recorded; for it is said of them, that they "searched diligently of whom, and of what time it was that the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when he testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow." But Sarah's words, however she meant them, were prophetic; for the apostle Paul, in his Epistle to the Galatians, quotes them, not as her words, but as the words of Scripture, the dictate of inspiration, inasmuch as he introduces them with the question,—"Nevertheless, what saith the Scripture? Cast out the bond-woman and her son; for the son of the bond-woman shall not be heir with the son of the free-woman." And, indeed, the context itself shows that Sarah's determination respecting the removal of Ishmael was sanctioned by the divine approbation; for we are told, that "the thing was very grievous in Abraham's sight because of his son:" but that "God said unto Abraham, Let it not be grievous in thy sight because of the lad, and because of thy bond-woman: in all that Sarah hath said unto thee, hearken unto her voice; for in Isaac shall thy seed be called." If Sarah was actuated in any degree by pride and resentment, her conduct to that extent could not be approved of in the sight of God, any more than at a future period Rebecca's could be, when she had recourse to fraud and falsehood in order to secure for her younger son, Jacob, the blessing of his father Isaac. But it was by Sarah's determination that God carried into effect his gracious purpose of giving to his servants a new assurance that in Isaac the promise should be fulfilled, inasmuch as he removed the only individual who might have laid claim to that promise, and who, in Sarah's apprehension, might have proved a formidable rival to her son. Wherefore the Lord said unto Abraham, "In all that Sarah hath said unto thee, hearken unto her voice; for in Isaac shall thy seed be called." And to reconcile the patriarch to the step which he was thus commanded to take, God gave him a promise that he would take Ishmael under the protection, and bestow upon him the blessings of his special providence; for he added,—"And also of the son of the bond-woman will I make a nation, because he is thy seed."

But, independently of the assurance thus given to Abraham that Isaac was to be the heir of the promises, and that in his seed

all the families of the earth should be blessed, the transaction here recorded was to furnish matter for interesting and important instruction to the Church in after-times. In the passage already referred to,—the fourth chapter of the Epistle to the Galatians,—we find the apostle employing it to illustrate the great subject of his letter, namely, the fundamental doctrine of justification by faith in Christ, without the works of the law. The churches of Galatia had been converted to the faith of the Gospel by the instrumentality of Paul's own preaching; and it appears that they had at first embraced the truth with great simplicity, and had manifested, moreover, the warmest affection for the apostle personally, as their spiritual father in Christ, whose preaching had been employed "to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they might receive the forgiveness of sins, and an inheritance among them that are sanctified, by faith that is in Christ Jesus." But, subsequently to this, false teachers had arisen, or crept in among them, who had laboured but too successfully, first in disparaging the authority of the apostle, and then in corrupting their mind from the simplicity that is in Christ, by inculcating the observance of the law as necessary for their justification in the sight of God. The object of the apostle's letter, then, was to recover the Galatians from this dangerous error, by showing them that if, in the matter of their justification and acceptance with God, they rested in any measure on the works of the law, Christ would profit them nothing,—they had fallen from grace. And in the course of his argument he refers to the passage under consideration, as furnishing an illustration of the great truth which he was inculcating. "Tell me," says he, "ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law? For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bond-maid, the other by a free-woman. But he who was of the bond-woman was born after the flesh; but he of the free-woman was by promise. Which things are an allegory," that is, a type or figurative representation: "for these are the two covenants," that is, types of the two covenants; "the one from Mount Sinai," namely, the law, "which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar. For this Agar," which literally signifies a rock, "is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem," that is, the dispensa-

tion of the law, to which the Jewish Church adhered for justification, "which now is, and is in bondage with her children. But Jerusalem which is above," that is, the Gospel dispensation, frequently called the kingdom of heaven, "is free, which is the mother of us all." "Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise."

All this, as applied to unbelieving Jews as contrasted with Christians, is very plain. The Sinai covenant, viewed in itself, could engender only bondage; for it required a perfect obedience on pain of death, and, therefore, bound over every transgressor to the endurance of the penalty, even the wrath of God due to sin. No doubt, during the subsistence of the old dispensation, the Gospel was preached, and the Covenant of Grace was administered: for the original promise, frequently repeated and solemnly confirmed, was still held out to the Church; and it was the very design of the law to shut men up to the faith of that promise, as that alone in which they could find rest and peace to their souls. But in itself the law could gender only bondage; and those who, after the manifestation of Christ, did still cleave to it as the ground of their hope for justification before God, were most appropriately denominated children of the bond-woman. They might not, indeed, be sensible of their bondage, nor alive to its bitterness; but they were, nevertheless, in bondage,—laid under the obligation of yielding perfect obedience, or of enduring the curse denounced against transgression. On the other hand, true believers, those who looked for justification by the blood of Christ alone, might, with equal propriety, be called the children of promise, as Isaac was, or the children of the free-woman,—inasmuch as they were not only delivered from that condemnation whereby the unbelieving Jews, who rejected Christ, and sought justification by deeds of law, were bound over to endure the punishment of transgressors, but had become partakers of all the blessings contained in the promise of which Isaac was the heir.

But the apostle's illustration must have been peculiarly interesting to the Galatians, when he proceeded to state another point of resemblance between Isaac on the occasion referred to, and Christians of the time at which the apostle wrote. "But as then," says he, "he that was born after the flesh persecuted

him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now." Here the apostle has authoritatively declared, that Ishmael's mocking was not an act of mere childish levity and thoughtlessness,—but that it was persecution,—an act prompted by a feeling of hostility, —a manifestation of enmity towards Isaac as the child of promise. Now, the Galatians could not be ignorant that such was the feeling which universally prevailed among the unbelieving Jews, against those of their brethren who had embraced the Gospel,—and indeed against Christians generally, where they could, or durst, manifest that feeling. The apostle, as they could not but know, had himself suffered frequently and severely from their enmity, and it was in the same spirit that false teachers had laboured so assiduously to seduce the Galatians from the simplicity of the Gospel. They could not fail, then, to perceive that there was great point, as well as great force, in the apostle's illustration; and to feel, moreover, that there was an awfully solemn warning in the words which he immediately quoted from the passage under consideration. The Galatians were well aware that, both among Jews and Gentiles, those whom the apostle denominated children of the bond-woman were by far the most numerous, and, in a worldly point of view, the most powerful; and their own experience had in all probability taught them, that the children of the promise were under many temptations to seek a way of escaping or of disarming the enmity of an unbelieving world, either by relinquishing or compromising their principles. And all this the apostle seems to admit, when he says, in reference to Ishmael and Isaac, "As then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now;" for these words seem plainly to intimate, that believers in that day were, as to numbers and strength, as little able to withstand the enmity of unbelievers, as Isaac was to contend with and to conquer Ishmael. "Nevertheless," he adds, obviously in the way both of warning and encouragement, —"Nevertheless"—notwithstanding all this apparent inequality, —"what saith the Scripture? Cast out the bond-woman and her son: for the son of the bond-woman shall not be heir with the son of the free-woman."

I need hardly remark that there is in this declaration of the apostle great encouragement to the church and people of God to

adhere to their principles, and to avow them, moreover, however weak they may appear to be, both in numbers and in worldly influence. Times of trial put men to the test; and in such times many who professed, and were thought by others, to be what the Galatians were reputed and reckoned by the apostle himself to have been, namely, willing to maintain the cause and the honour of Christ at all hazards, have been found, if not open enemies, at least backward and lukewarm friends. I fear much that now, as in the days of the apostle, there is, even in professedly Christian countries, a large majority who will be found ranking themselves against the interests of Christ's kingdom, whenever these come into competition with worldly honours and interests, and that they will have no difficulty in finding out plausible reasons for so doing. But times of trial do also furnish opportunities for the special manifestation of the faithfulness and power of God, as pledged on behalf of those who are by his grace enabled to take his word for their guide, and his promise for their security; and though they may appear to contend with fearful odds,—though the general sentiments and practices of the world may be against them,—and though in their own circle they may stand almost alone, exposed to the mockery of the majority, so that they may appear like the helpless Isaac, vainly contending with the wild and precocious Ishmael,—yet if they will but be contented to endure patiently as seeing Him who is invisible, they will find in their experience that He who is for them is greater than all that can be against them. I do not say that he will deliver them in the way that they might expect and wish for. He may see meet to deny them the deliverance which they most anxiously desired,—their adversaries, to all appearance, may be permitted to triumph;—but on reflection, they will be convinced that the cause of truth and righteousness,—the cause of Christ and of his kingdom,—is not bound up in their personal comfort. It may be that, by their suffering, that cause is to be ultimately advanced far more than by their prosperity; and if they are indeed Christ's people,—if they are the children of the free-woman, the children of promise,—it will be consolation enough for them to believe that they are instrumental in forwarding the Messiah's kingdom, even though it be by much trial and tribulation on their part.

There have been, in all ages of the Church, many who, from their own happy experience, could have responded to these sentiments,—many who were willing not only to do, but to suffer any thing whereby they might show forth the praises of Him who had called them out of darkness into his marvellous light. And I trust there are many such still,—many who, in opposition to all discouragements, have had grace given them to stand their ground, and to maintain their integrity, refusing to let it go. There is no man, be his condition what it may, who is not liable to all these trials and temptations; but if he is a true believer, —if he has received the spirit of adoption, whereby he can cry Abba, Father,—if he has been translated into the glorious liberty of the sons of God, then he has nothing to fear, though he may have a great deal to suffer: for though he may stand alone, a marked and a denied man among those with whom he has to associate,—though misunderstood, misrepresented, and reviled,— yet he will have the testimony of his own conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity he has maintained his principles, anxious to avoid giving offence to any man, and he will have the witness also of the Spirit, "bearing witness with his spirit, that he is a child of God, a son, and if a son, then an heir, an heir of God, and a joint-heir with Christ."

But this suggests to every one the very grave and important question, Am I a child of the bond woman or of the free? By nature we are all the children of bondage, inasmuch as, being sinners, we are all the children of wrath, alienated from God, and enemies to him in our heart by wicked works. But we all profess to believe in the Gospel; and there is enough in the Gospel to enable every man, who is honest and simple in his inquiries, to determine whether he is still in his natural state of subjection to sin, and therefore of bondage to the fears and misgivings of a guilty conscience, or whether he has found peace and rest in the proposals which the Gospel makes to him. We are not, indeed, any longer in the precise circumstances of the primitive Christians, to whom the apostle refers in his commentary on this passage; for it is no longer a question whether the observance of the ceremonial law is necessary for our justification in the sight of God. But the desire of seeking acceptance with God on the ground of religious observances and of virtuous

doings was not peculiar or exclusively confined to the Jews. It is the dictate of man's corrupt nature,—the plea of his pride,—that which is the last and the most difficult for him to abandon. Multitudes can bear witness to the truth of this statement in their own bitter experience; for multitudes, even after deep and serious convictions of guilt, have, from a misapprehension of the nature of the Gospel, laboured and toiled to find peace of conscience, by endeavouring to yield such an obedience to the law as they thought would give them the hope of pardon and acceptance with God,—while the more sincerely and honestly that they laboured, the more did they discover of their manifold transgressions and grievous shortcomings. They were under the law, and therefore they were in bondage. Not only did they feel that they were under an obligation to yield obedience to a law which they could not satisfy,—but the obedience they did yield, far short though it was of what the commandment required, was dictated by a slavish spirit, the very opposite of that love which is the essence of true obedience.

I do not say that all who are thus seeking justification by the deeds of the law are conscious of being in a state of bondage. I fear, on the contrary, that the greater part have no such sense of their true condition. They are satisfied with such a degree of external conformity to the letter of the divine commandment, as they can attain to without much mortification or self-denial; and though the limited obedience which they do yield is dictated by a mercenary spirit, they feel no uneasiness on that account, and no doubt or suspicion about its being accepted and rewarded. It is only, in fact, when they are led to take a more extended view of the requirements of the law, and when their conscience is awakened by the spirituality and rigour of its demands, that they begin to feel that they are in bondage. They find that they had never made any approach towards satisfying these demands; nay, that they never seriously made any attempt to do so. And if they do make the attempt, they will very soon find that the attainment at which they aim becomes every day more hopeless,—that new discoveries of the exceeding breadth of the divine commandment are constantly opening up to them,—and that not only do they come far, very far short of what they attempt to reach, but that the spirit by which they

are actuated is a spirit of bondage, even a slavish fear, which pollutes every one act of obedience, and gives to it a character the very opposite of that which distinguishes acceptable obedience. It might be supposed that on making this discovery, none could hesitate for a moment to seek in the Gospel what they find it hopeless to attain by any efforts of their own; and that they would instantly see, in the doctrine of justification by faith in Christ, a way of escape from the intolerable bondage under which they are held by a legal spirit. But it is not always so. On the contrary, many have continued long thus to labour in the fire, and to weary themselves for very vanity. But when they are brought to understand, and embrace, and cordially to approve God's method of justifying sinners,—when they perceive that the very first proposal that is made to them is a free forgiveness through the blood of the Cross,—and when they are enabled to receive and rest upon Christ alone for this forgiveness,—then they are literally, and in the true sense of the word, set free,—the spirit of bondage gives place to the spirit of adoption, awakening in their minds filial confidence towards God,—and their hearts are enlarged to run in the way of the divine commandments. They feel more deeply than ever their obligation to keep these commandments; but it is the obligation imposed by gratitude,—the effort to obey is an effort of love,—and their obedience, though still very imperfect, will not only be carried farther than it was ever before attempted to carry it, but it will be obedience of a totally different character,—the obedience of an affectionate child, instead of the unwilling service of a slave. To those, then, who have in any degree experienced this change of state towards God, I would say, Stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made you free; and while you dwell with grateful admiration on the grace and unmerited mercy to which you are indebted for the glorious privilege of thus enjoying the light and liberty of the children of God, remember that the end and design of this privilege is that you may serve God cheerfully,—in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter.

XII.

THE OFFERING UP OF ISAAC.

GENESIS XXII. 1–12.

It is said by the apostle James, "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: but every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed." I need hardly remark, then, that when it is said in the passage under consideration that "God did tempt Abraham," the expression cannot be understood in the sense of which the apostle speaks of tempting. But our Lord has himself instructed his disciples to say, in addressing God in prayer, "Lead us not into temptation." There is, therefore, a sense in which it may be said that God tempts, or leads men into temptation; and a little reflection will satisfy every one that this is perfectly consistent with the declaration of the apostle. Scarcely any change can take place in a man's worldly circumstances, whether for the better or the worse, which does not in some way or other, and to a certain extent, put his principles and character to the test; and if that change is such as greatly to affect his condition, whether by increasing or diminishing his comforts, it may, through the perverseness of his nature, become a very powerful temptation, and one, moreover, by which he is overcome. Every one, indeed, must be familiar with the melancholy consequence of such a change in men's worldly circumstances and condition; for while adversity has but too often the effect, not only of awakening feelings of

rebellion against the divine dispensations, but of furnishing an excuse for acts of dishonesty and fraud, it still more frequently happens that prosperity has been the occasion of ungodliness, profligacy, and crime. Now, such changes in men's condition may take place in the providence of God by means of events over which they have no control; and in this sense it may be said that God has brought them into circumstances of trial or temptation. But while men themselves are alone responsible for the guilt of thus perverting the bounty or despising the chastening of the Lord, his dispensations are in their nature and tendency most gracious, and if improved, as they are designed to be, would in every case be productive of effects conducive alike to the manifestation of his glory and to the best interests of his people. And so it will be found in the instance before us, when it is said of the patriarch, "that God did tempt Abraham."

If we would estimate aright the severity of the trial to which Abraham was subjected, we must keep in view the many difficulties which he had already surmounted, and the circumstances in which he was placed at the period here referred to. We learn from his preceding history, that having received a command to leave his country, and his kindred, and his father's house, he not only obeyed and went out, not knowing whither he went, but that on coming to the land whither he had been directed, instead of finding there what the worldly mind would naturally have wished for and expected,—the immediate possession of a portion of the land, and a reasonable prospect of his family becoming gradually and in due time proprietors of the whole, as it had been promised that they should be,—he very soon discovered that he was never to be any thing more than a sojourner there, and that even his posterity were to be pilgrims and strangers like himself,—nay, afflicted and evil entreated for four hundred years. It is true, he had no ground for feeling disappointed or dissatisfied with this ordination; for along with the promise of Canaan to his posterity, he was assured that in him all the families of the earth were to be blessed;—and beholding, as we are told he did, the day of Christ, though afar off, and looking forward to a more enduring substance than any earthly inheritance, even a city which hath foundations whose builder and maker is

God, he might well be contented to dwell as a sojourner in the land of promise.

But we must never forget that it was the very magnitude of the spiritual blessing thus promised that rendered the patriarch's trial peculiarly severe. Though he was willing for himself personally to be a sojourner all his life long in the land which had been promised to him and to his seed after him; yet that he should have a son, and that his family should one day come to the possession of Canaan, was essential to the fulfilment of all that the divine promise involved respecting the coming of Christ. Whatever doubt, therefore, might arise in his mind as to the former, went immediately to affect the foundation of his hopes regarding the latter. And on the former his faith was severely tried. For many years after he came to the land of Canaan, there was no prospect of the divine promise being fulfilled. He saw himself exposed to danger, and felt in himself the approach of old age, and still no provision made for securing the accomplishment of all that was most interesting to himself, and most momentous to the families of the earth. And though from time to time his spirit was revived and his heart reassured by a renewal of the promise, yet no reason appears to have been given him for the delay of the promise that he should have a son,—an event essential to the commencement of that series of marvellous interpositions and mighty works which was to terminate in the coming of the promised Deliverer. Nay, after he appeared to have settled his hopes on Ishmael, and to have relinquished all expectation of any other heir of the promise, these hopes were to be utterly overthrown. He was expressly assured that Ishmael was not the child with whom the covenant was to be established. And he was required, "against hope, to believe in hope that he was to become the father of many nations," by a son who was yet unborn. Over this, too, however, severe as the trial was, the patriarch's faith was enabled to triumph. Isaac was born, agreeably to the word of the Lord. In his birth Abraham saw, to the full extent of all that he could expect or reasonably desire, the fulfilment of the promise, in the faith of which he had so long lived. And concluding, therefore, as he had reason to do, that all the doubts and perplexities in which he might at times have been involved were for ever at an end, we could con-

ceive him waiting in holy tranquillity the termination of his eventful pilgrimage, and his translation to that better country, even an heavenly, where God had prepared for him a city. He beheld in the person of his infant son the pledge of His coming, whose day he saw afar off and was glad. The clouds, which had for a time obscured to his eye the light of that day, were at length dispelled; and on the evening of his life were shed, in growing brightness, the rays of the Sun of Righteousness, whom he beheld rising on the nations with healing in his beams.

Such, as we may easily conceive, might have been the feelings and prospects of the patriarch on the birth of Isaac; and when God was graciously pleased to lengthen out his days, and permit him to see his son grow up, the object of the divine favour and blessing, his confidence in the fulfilment of all that God had promised concerning him and his posterity could not fail to gather strength. And what then must have been his feeling, when, in the midst of all his security, and comfort, and hopes, God said to him, "Abraham, take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt-offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of?" It were vain to attempt embodying in language the emotions which such a command must have awakened in the mind of the patriarch,—a command which, both from its own nature, and from the circumstances in which it was given, subjected him to a trial altogether unparalleled in the history of God's dealings with men. It may not, however, be unprofitable to dwell for a little on some of the considerations which must have contributed to augment the severity of his trial, and, consequently, to exhibit the strength of his faith.

The patriarch's trial was a fearful one, inasmuch as he was required to do a deed the most painfully repulsive to parental affection. That he was deliberately to put forth his hand and slay his son, was itself a thought sufficient to awaken the most agonising feelings, and one which might have suggested many plausible doubts whether it was possible that such a command could come from God. It had been solemnly declared to Noah, on his receiving anew, after the flood, dominion over the world, "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed;"

but it was a thing altogether unheard of that in any case man's blood might be shed in sacrifice, or that a father's offering up a son was to be an exemption from the general law whereby God had raised a defence around the life of man. It might have been urged, therefore, with some show of reason, that God could not give a command so directly opposed to his own solemn declaration. Abraham's affection, too, as a father, might be supposed to have been fertile in expedients whereby to make his escape from the necessity of executing such a command: for that his parental affections were strong and ardent is expressly testified of him in Scripture, where it is recorded, that when "Sarah said concerning Hagar, Cast out this bond-woman and her son; for the son of this bond-woman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac," "the thing was very grievous in Abraham's sight because of his son." And if it was very grievous to Abraham merely to send away Ishmael from his house,—though the Lord had long before said concerning him, "As for Ishmael, I have heard thee: behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation,"—how inconceivably more grievous must it have been to him to be required, not merely to send Isaac away, committing him to the keeping of God's holy providence, but with his own hands to put him to death!

Isaac on many accounts must have been peculiarly dear to Abraham. He was the son of his old age; his birth was associated with the recollection of all that was most interesting and important in his own eventful life; he was the only son of Sarah, who had shared with him all the fears, and the hopes, and the anxieties of his pilgrimage; and he must have been not a little endeared to him by the departure of Ishmael, as being the only remaining consolation of his declining years. In addition to all this, Isaac had already arrived at that age when children have in general most powerfully engrossed the affections of a parent. We are not, indeed, informed how old he was; but we can gather from what is recorded, that he had reached an age at which all the dispositions and affections best calculated to engage a parent's heart have already developed themselves,—for we are told of the converse which was held between Abraham

and his son while on their way to the place where this marvellous act of obedience on the part of the patriarch was to be consummated, that when, on the third day of their journey, "Abraham lift up his eyes, and saw the place" of sacrifice "afar off," he "said unto his young men, Abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you. And Abraham took the wood of the burnt-offering, and laid it upon Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife; and they went both of them together. And Isaac spake unto Abraham his father, and said, My father: and he said, Here am I, my son. And he said, Behold the fire and the wood; but where is the lamb for a burnt-offering? And Abraham said, My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt-offering: so they went both of them together." There is enough in this simple narrative to intimate very expressively the affection which Abraham must have felt for Isaac,—not only as having reached the period when his intellectual powers were sufficiently unfolded to minister largely to the enjoyment of a parent, but as manifesting love and reverence for the God of his father, and promising to become all that a believing parent could wish a son to be. The very language, indeed, in which the command was expressed, bore witness to the tenderness with which Abraham loved Isaac, and obviously implied that, even on this ground, the demand was designed to be a peculiarly severe trial of the patriarch's faith. Instead of being simply required to go and offer up Isaac for a burnt-offering, he was addressed in such a way as to intimate that care was taken, as it were, to call his paternal affection into the most lively exercise,—being reminded that the individual whom he was called in this unprecedented manner to give up to God was his son, his only son, the son whom he loved. "Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt-offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of."

But painful, even to agony, as might be the thought of putting to death with his own hand his son, his only son, the son whom he loved, this was neither the only nor the most appalling consideration that must have presented itself to Abraham's mind on receiving such a command. Had Isaac stood to him simply

in the relation of a son to a father, near and dear as that relation is, we could conceive, from what he had previously manifested of confidence in the divine wisdom, reverence for the divine sovereignty, and devotedness to the divine glory, that it might have cost him a comparatively light struggle to execute the command of God, by offering up that son in sacrifice. He had long before deliberately chosen God as his portion, and the word of God as his security; in that word he had often placed his undivided confidence, in circumstances of perplexity and trouble, and never failed to find it a tried and a sure word; and every day of his protracted pilgrimage in the land of strangers afforded new experience of the faithfulness of Him whom he had chosen as his shield and his exceeding great reward. When he remembered, then, how the Lord had preserved, and provided for, and prospered him,—and when he reflected on the circumstances in which Isaac had been given to him,—circumstances peculiarly calculated to remind him that his child was the gift of God, bestowed upon him as a special, an unprecedented mark of favour, and therefore in a special manner to be surrendered to the divine disposal;—such considerations, we could suppose, might have silenced the selfish and rebellious murmurings of parental affection, and prompted him, without hesitation, to offer up even the son whom he loved a burnt-offering to his God. But Isaac did not stand to Abraham merely in the ordinary relation of a son to a father. He was Abraham's only son in a far higher sense of the word than simply as the only son of Sarah, inasmuch as he was the child of promise, in whose life was bound up all that God had purposed and foretold respecting the family of the patriarch, and whose death could not be compensated by any or by all of the other sons that might still be born to him. If Isaac was to die, all the patriarch's hopes must die with him. It could avail him nothing in the way of consolation or of hope that Ishmael was still spared to him, or that, peradventure, another son might be given him in Isaac's room. The promise respecting the latter had been too frequently and too solemnly given to admit the possibility of its being fulfilled in another. The assurance given to Abraham, that in him all the families of the earth were to be blessed, and which at one time, for any thing he knew, might have been accomplished in

Ishmael, or in such other children as God was pleased to give him, had latterly been restricted in the most absolute manner to Isaac.

Upon Isaac, therefore, and upon his life, was actually suspended the hope, not of the patriarch only, but of all the families of a lost world; for if there was any truth in the communication made to Abraham,—any purpose of mercy towards sinners in the covenant made with the patriarch,—it was through Isaac alone that it could be carried into effect. And was the patriarch, then, in one instant, and with his own hand, to terminate a life on which such momentous consequences were suspended? Only a few years had elapsed since the same consequences were inseparably connected with the patriarch's believing that Isaac should be born; and now that he was born, Abraham having against hope believed in hope, was he to be cut off, while yet his birth had availed nothing towards the fulfilment of the promise of which he was the heir? And was he to be slain by the hands of him whose highest exercise of faith had till then been to believe the promise, that in Isaac should his seed be called? This was unspeakably the severest of all the trials to which the faith of the patriarch had ever been subjected; and it is to this, accordingly, that we find the apostle especially referring. To all appearance, and according to human estimates of things, the command carried with it a palpable contradiction of all that had been previously revealed and promised; and there seemed to be no escape for the patriarch from the fearful alternative of either disobeying the command which he had received,—thereby apparently pronouncing the whole revelation of God to him unworthy of credit,—or doing an act which was to render the fulfilment of God's promises impossible,—thereby seeming to declare that he had relinquished all the hopes which these promises had inspired. And what a conflict might not such an alternative be conceived to give rise to in the mind of Abraham,—tempting him on the one hand to forfeit, by a single act of disobedience, all the good things which God had spoken concerning him and his seed; and threatening him, on the other, with the very same calamity, by the ruin of all his hopes in the death of him on whose life they were suspended? For if he outwardly complied with the command, under the conviction that the promise of God was

thereby rendered vain, he did as certainly forfeit the good things which it contained as he would have done by an act of disobedience. To use the words of a very profound and learned divine, "He seemed to be pressed unavoidably with one or the other of the greatest evils in the world, either of them eternally ruinous unto him: either he must disobey the command of God,—or he must let go his faith in the promise; either of them being filled with eternal ruin."

And what was the part which Abraham acted in this fearful extremity? To this question we find an answer in the simple, but solemn, I would say sublime, narrative of the inspired historian, who tells us, that on receiving the command, "Abraham rose up early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the burnt-offering, and rose up, and went unto the place of which God had told him." And if it be asked, How or on what principle was it that he proceeded so promptly, and with so calm and sedate a spirit, as the history testifies that he did, to execute a command which might have been expected to overwhelm him in the most agonising perplexity? we shall find a solution of this question in the statement of the apostle, when he says,—"By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac; and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son," with whose life the fulfilment of all these promises was inseparably connected, inasmuch as it was expressly and repeatedly said of him, "In Isaac shall thy seed be called."

Nothing is said, either by the sacred historian or by the apostle, as to the state of Abraham's mind during the period that elapsed between his receiving and his executing this extraordinary command, or whether it gave rise in his soul to any very severe or protracted conflict. It may, however, as I conceive, be gathered from both, that there was nothing of the distraction, or disorder, or repining, which unbelief never fails to generate under painful trials or heavy affliction. He appears to have set himself, without hesitation or delay, to execute the divine command,—and to have retained, at the moment of doing so, the same confidence in God which he had manifested on all former occasions when His revealed will was concerned.

As to the manner in which God was to reconcile the death of

Isaac with His own faithfulness in fulfilling the promise, of which Isaac was the heir, nothing seems to have been revealed. Indeed, the very trial of Abraham's faith consisted in his receiving an absolute command without any such explanation; and he did not, therefore, perplex himself with presumptuous inquiries on the subject. Firmly believing that the promises, which, as to their accomplishment, were yet afar off, but which he had embraced and lived upon, were the promises of the ever-living and unchangeable God, he felt assured that they would infallibly be accomplished. He was persuaded that, though Isaac were put to death, he would be raised again from the dead, rather than that one word of all that God had spoken should fall to the ground. And leaving it, therefore, to God himself to provide for the vindication of His own veracity and faithfulness, he felt that it was his duty to obey, without attempting to reconcile seeming contradictions in the divine procedure, or seeking to solve difficulties on subjects about which he had received no revelation. All this, indeed, was the farthest removed possible from the doubts and difficulties with which the human heart is wont to be perplexed under calls to painful duty, and from the various pleas which it is generally found to urge for delaying such duties, or escaping from them altogether. But it was just because Abraham's faith had raised him above all such subterfuges of unbelief that his example has been recorded for the reproof, and encouragement, and consolation of the Church. Being convinced that the command came from God, he saw that nothing remained for him but to obey; he set himself to resist all the suggestions, and temptations, and plausible reasonings of fleshly wisdom, knowing that they were the forerunners of disobedience; and with a holy fortitude, to which martyrdom itself furnishes no parallel, he laid in order the altar, and took the knife, and put forth his hand to slay his son. His hand, indeed, was arrested, and Isaac's life was spared. But in heart and in will Abraham had offered him. In so far as obedience to the divine command was concerned, the act was complete; and with regard to the patriarch's submission to the sovereign will of God, Isaac was delivered unto the death. He is accordingly represented by the apostle as having been actually offered; and Abraham is said to have received him from the dead in a

figure,—implying that, though not actually put to death, yet so unreservedly had he been given up, when his life was spared, he was as much a new gift from God as if he had been raised from the dead. And so it appeared in the sight of God, who testified his acceptance of Abraham's offering as if it had been completed: for when "the Lord called unto him out of heaven, and said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him," it was added, "for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from me." "By myself have I sworn, saith the Lord; for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son; that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea-shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice."

Such was probably the last, and assuredly the most severe, of all the peculiar trials to which the patriarch was exposed, for the purpose of demonstrating to the Church,—Abraham's spiritual seed,—what afflictions may be endured and what difficulties may be surmounted by the exercise of a simple faith in the word of God, whether in matters of promise or of command. And where is there or can there be a case of trial, however complicated or severe, under which the believer's perplexities may not be resolved, his murmurings silenced, and his heart reassured, the moment he turns his thoughts to the conduct of Abraham on this occasion? The case of the patriarch was one of such terrible extremity, so overwhelming to human feeling, and so utterly beyond the reach of any help which human reason could devise or human strength provide, that, amidst the endless diversity of affliction to which his spiritual children are here exposed, there is no case to which his is not applicable, for there can be none in which the believer's trust in God is put to so severe a trial as his was. With regard, indeed, to the affliction in which that trial originated,—the death of his son, his only son, the son whom he loved,—many of his spiritual offspring may be visited with a similar bereavement; and they who have been so may be ready to say that it is one of the most painful that they can be called to endure. But what is there in the most

aggravated case of such a bereavement now, that can, in any one of its circumstances, be regarded as parallel with that of the patriarch? However unexpected the time or painful the manner, what parent is required to be himself the executioner of the sentence that has gone forth? However mysterious the circumstances connected with the event, there is nothing in it that bears even the appearance of contradicting any one promise of God previously given, as it was in the case of Abraham. And whatever worldly object of importance be affected by such a calamity, it trenches not upon the foundation of the believer's hope, the hope through Christ of an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away.

And if such, then, was Abraham's resignation of himself to the absolute sovereignty of God,—such his confidence in the wisdom and rectitude of the divine procedure,—and such the perfect prostration of his will before the will of Jehovah, that without delay he proceeded to obey a command which, for any thing that his reason could discover to the contrary, was to dissolve his covenant with God, overthrow the foundation of his hope, and dissipate the fairest of his prospects; with what meek, and humble, and silent resignation, may not believers now be expected to endure the heaviest stroke of their heavenly Father's afflicting hand? Abraham, it is true, was spared the actual execution of the appalling deed. But had he gone about it with the secret hope or expectation that it would be so,—that it was never intended that he should really do what was commanded,—and that an interposition of divine authority would take place to relieve him from the terrible necessity,—it is evident that his compliance would not have been such as God required, nor that of which he would have said, "Now I know that thou fearest me, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from me."

The fact that Abraham's offering was accepted, though he was spared the pain of actually slaying his son, places his resignation to the divine will in a very striking light. His was not the resignation of necessity, endeavouring to reconcile himself to an event which was past, and could not therefore be recalled. He gave his deliberate consent to the divine purpose before it was executed; the Searcher of hearts testified concerning him,

that this consent was unreservedly and cordially given; and if the deed had actually been done, it would have been found that Abraham had no new conflict to go through, in the way of bringing himself to acquiesce in the divine determination. Nor is this the least important and instructive of the many considerations connected with this portion of the patriarch's history; for I fear it will be found that there is often an appearance of resignation and of preparedness for a threatened affliction which is not realised when the affliction actually takes place,—nay, that the rebellious feelings which do then break forth, do but too clearly show that the former was but a feigned submission. And what is this but just an attempt to purchase exemption from affliction by the appearance of humility, and to secure the gratification of our own will by appearing to acquiesce in the will of God? There is more, in such a state of mind, of the submission of fear than the resignation of confidence; and it bears no sort of resemblance to that of Abraham, when, at the command of God, he did without hesitation offer up Isaac, his only son, the son whom he loved.

XIII.

JEHOVAH-JIREH.

GENESIS XXII. 14.

THE name, Jehovah-Jireh, which Abraham gave to the place where he had offered up his son Isaac, literally signifies, "The Lord will see," or "The Lord will provide." The same word, "Jireh," occurs in the 8th verse, where it must mean provide, and where accordingly it is so rendered, when in reply to Isaac's question, "Behold the fire and the wood; but where is the lamb for a burnt-offering? Abraham said, My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt-offering." Nor can it be doubted, I think, that Abraham so named the place in allusion to the reply which he made to Isaac,—a reply which was verified in a way which at the time he little expected, and moreover contained a depth of meaning which he did not at first perceive. And, in fact, the passage admits of being rendered so as plainly to intimate that the name which Abraham gave to the place was suggested by the answer which he had given to the natural and very affecting question of Isaac. As the last clause of the verse stands in our translation, it is difficult to see a distinct meaning in it: "As it is said to this day, In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen." But it may be literally rendered, "As, or because he had said that day in the mount, The Lord will provide;" and this rendering gives to it a meaning at once simple and most appropriate. Abraham called the place, "The Lord will provide," because he had said that day to Isaac in the mount, "The Lord will provide himself

a lamb for a burnt-offering;" and a very little reflection will satisfy us that the patriarch had good reason so to name the place, not only in commemoration of the marvellous instance of the divine goodness which he there experienced, but as a prediction of a still more glorious display of the grace and goodness of God, and as conveying to the Church, in all subsequent times, the gracious assurance that God is with his people in every extremity, and will prove to them a very present help in the time of trouble.

When Abraham said to Isaac, as we find him doing in the 8th verse, "My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt-offering," there is no ground for supposing that he anticipated what afterwards took place, when the Lord called unto him out of heaven, and said, "Abraham, lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him." There can be no doubt that his mind was made up to yield unreserved obedience to the divine command, and that he proceeded to do so without any secret hope or expectation of being relieved from a duty the most painful and self-denying that ever was imposed on a human being; for had it been otherwise with him, it could not have been said to him, as it was said by the Searcher of hearts, "Now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from me." His answer to Isaac, then, in so far as his own motive and meaning were concerned, was dictated partly by a feeling of tenderness towards his son, to whom he was unwilling to disclose fully and at once the trial that awaited him, and partly by the desire of warning and preparing him for that trial. The first impression, I think, on reading the narrative of what passed between Abraham and Isaac is, that Abraham meant to silence his son's inquiries,—to forbid him, as it were, to ask him any questions about a matter which in due time would be fully made known to him. "Isaac spake unto Abraham his father, and said, My father: and he said, Here am I, my son. And he said, Behold the fire and the wood; but where is the lamb for a burnt-offering? And Abraham said, My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt-offering: so they went both of them together." In this reply there was, no doubt, something like a prohibition laid upon Isaac, not to inquire into the purpose of the long journey which he

and his father had taken; and one can hardly help supposing that Isaac's question was dictated by some secret anticipation of what was to follow,—some impression that he was personally concerned in the object of that mysterious journey. But we cannot suppose that Abraham, of whose tenderness and parental affection we have the most unequivocal proof, could coldly or sternly forbid his son to ask him any question about the object of an expedition so awfully momentous to him; and though he did, therefore, decline telling him in plain terms what that object was, he must have done so with every manifestation of affection, and in such a way as to show that his own heart was full, and that he was engaged in a very solemn transaction. And in accordance with this was the manner of his answer: "My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt-offering," —an answer which was plainly intended to prepare Isaac for the very trying scene which was soon to follow, by impressing him with the conviction that when the overwhelming trial came, it was a trial of divine appointment, and one, therefore, against which it was alike as vain and sinful to rebel as it would have been to dispute the authority or resist the power of God, if disease, instead of a father's hand, had been commissioned to terminate his earthly existence.

What else Abraham said and urged to reconcile Isaac to the divine appointment we are not told. But that he was reconciled, and that he submitted, not only without resistance, but with all meekness to the divine ordination, is very plainly implied in the marvellous simplicity of the narrative; for we are told that Abraham and Isaac "came to the place which God had told him of: and Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order; and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood. And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son." Whatever were the considerations by which Abraham persuaded Isaac to submit to the divine appointment, none, I think, can read this narrative without feeling convinced that Isaac was submissive, and that if this wonderful act of obedience on the part of Abraham had been consummated, it would have met with no resistance on the part of his son. And it can be as little doubted that one of the considerations by which Isaac was thus reconciled to the fate which awaited him was

Abraham's reply, "My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt-offering," inasmuch as he was thereby assured that his father acted in obedience to an express command of God. But little did the patriarch know that when he uttered these words he was speaking prophetically,—that God had indeed provided himself a burnt-offering, by means of which Isaac was to be spared, and Abraham himself delivered from the most painful and perplexing trial to which a human being had ever been exposed. And when "the Angel of the Lord called unto him out of heaven, and said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him;"—and when "he lifted up his eyes, and looked, and, behold, behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns;" —with what overwhelming admiration and gratitude must his reply to Isaac have rushed upon his mind, "My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt-offering!" And when he had "taken the ram, and had offered him up for a burnt-offering in the stead of his son," what more natural or appropriate than to endeavour to perpetuate the remembrance of this marvellous transaction by designating the spot where it took place, "Jehovah-Jireh," "The Lord will provide?"

We can easily conceive that Abraham himself, and his posterity after him, dwelt frequently and with deep interest on the recollection of this singular manifestation of the grace of God; and that in seasons of trial and perplexity, the sight or the name of Mount Moriah would encourage their heart and strengthen their hands in God. But the name which Abraham attached to the place where he had himself experienced so remarkable an interposition, is not a mere memorial of that particular event. It announces a truth in which every believer may find abundant encouragement and consolation, and which has, in point of fact, revived the hope and refreshed the spirit of multitudes in every age. "The Lord will provide," is a promise in which all the spiritual seed of Abraham have an interest as well as he himself had; and when they walk in his footsteps,—when, like him, they are found in the way of duty and holy obedience,—they may reckon on its being fulfilled in the way and to the extent that is best for them, and most conducive to the advancement of the divine glory. And their own experience will bear ample testimony to the faithfulness of this promise in the numerous in-

stances in which it has been fulfilled, if they have been careful to mark and remember these instances. None of them, it is true, may or can have been so striking as that which occurred to Abraham; for none of his children have ever been reduced to such an extremity of trial as he was. But manifold instances of unexpected deliverance or relief have occurred to all; and though many of these may have appeared to be of comparatively little importance, not affecting, either permanently or to any great extent, the worldly condition and comfort of those to whom they occurred, and were on this account little thought of at the moment, and very soon forgotten afterwards, yet they were not less the interposition of God's providence, designed to awaken the gratitude and command the confidence of those on whose behalf they were wrought.

There is, indeed, reason to fear that many such interpositions are but little regarded, if they are not entirely overlooked, even by those who are ready to admit as a general truth, that all events, great and small, are arranged and determined by Him who sees the bearing of every one of these events upon another, and who calculates with unerring accuracy the effect of all these circumstances, even the apparently most trifling, which constitute the lot of every individual. But, to say nothing of the ingratitude of such sinful blindness and indifference to the hand of God, they who are habitually chargeable with it are little aware of the extent to which they deprive themselves of one of the purest enjoyments of which their nature is capable. For what can be more delightful in itself, or more salutary as an habitual frame of mind and feeling, than to be ready on all occasions to recognise the hand of God, and the wisdom, as well as the beneficence, of his providential arrangements, by which, even in the most ordinary events of life, our annoyances are diminished, and our comforts multiplied or enhanced? And if we are careful to cherish such a constant sense of God's overruling providence, we shall not fail to discover instances in abundance of such unexpected interpositions as have to a very great extent affected our worldly condition, and have proved the source of not a little of the most permanent of our comforts. It is not possible for us, I think, to look back on our past lives, even with the slightest effort of recollection, without calling to mind many instances of unlooked-for de-

liverances and relief. When called to difficult and painful duties, which not only the love of ease and self-indulgence might have prompted us to evade, but a sense of our own incapacity and weakness led us to shrink from, how often have we found that on addressing ourselves in simplicity to these duties, all the anticipated difficulties, if not actually removed, were, one by one, so diminished, and eventually so easily surmounted, as to leave us in wonder why we had ever thought them so formidable! When harassed with cares, and disturbed with perplexing fears as to our worldly circumstances,—when no efforts of our own were sufficient to work out our escape,—and when we saw no quarter from which enlargement could be asked or looked for, how frequently have our fears been disappointed, and the evils which threatened us been removed in a way and at a time that we did not expect, and could not have reckoned on! And on other occasions, when our hopes were disappointed, and when we were ready to conclude that nothing could ever fully make up for the disappointment, in how many instances have we found that it would have been greatly worse if our hopes had been realised,—and that what we reckoned a calamity eventually turned out a blessing!

All of us must have experienced occurrences like these, more or less striking, and more or less deeply affecting our temporal comforts and enjoyments; and if they have not made a very deep impression upon us,—if they have not been so important in themselves, or so extensive in their consequences, as to appear to us worthy of special remembrance,—it is because we have failed to examine and ponder them as we ought to have done, and to discover in them the hand of Him without whom a sparrow falleth not to the ground. However smooth may have been the tenor of our life, or however little disturbed our ordinary and everyday comforts, we must all have experienced innumerable instances of unexpected interpositions of God's providence, mitigating our afflictions, disappointing our fears, providing for our safety and our comfort, and in a thousand ways augmenting the amount of our enjoyments. And what is it to have a devout frame of spirit, but to be careful to mark and to remember these,—to have our thoughts naturally turning to God,—to be ready to recognise and acknowledge his hand in

every thing,—and to be prepared to say, on reviewing the past, "The Lord hath provided," and in looking forward to the future, "The Lord will provide."

Hitherto we have considered the passage simply in reference to God's gracious interposition on behalf of Abraham and Isaac, and to the practical lesson which in this view it is fitted to teach, and have taken occasion to remark, that when Abraham said, "My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt-offering," he was, though unconscious of it, speaking prophetically,—predicting what, we have seen, actually took place. But it must have occurred, I think, to every one, that when he so addressed Isaac, he spoke prophetically of another, and an infinitely more important sacrifice than that which was substituted in the room of his son. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, he was plainly instructed to foretell the coming of Him who was emphatically the Lamb of God, and in whom was literally fulfilled the prediction uttered by Abraham,—"God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt-offering." The very words employed by Abraham would naturally suggest this interpretation; for the sacrifice which was offered in the person of Christ, when he poured out his soul an offering for sin, was in a peculiar sense a sacrifice of God's own providing. But there are various circumstances connected with the transaction here recorded which go to confirm that interpretation. Isaac himself was evidently intended to be a type of Christ; and, indeed, there is perhaps no typical representation in the Old Testament Scriptures, in which the plan of redemption, so far as that plan more immediately relates to the manifestation of the love of God in giving up his only-begotten and well-beloved Son for the salvation of the world, is so fully and plainly set forth, as in this history of the patriarch, when he was required to offer up Isaac for a burnt-offering. We can hardly venture to enter on a minute examination of the various circumstances in which a resemblance may be traced between the conduct of Abraham in offering Isaac, and the divine procedure in giving up Christ to the death, that the guilty might be saved,—for the subject is very holy, and awfully solemn. But we may quote the words of Holy Writ, and compare Scripture with Scripture.

It is recorded. then, concerning Abraham, that God said unto

him, "Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt-offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of." And an apostle has said, in reference to the same transaction, "By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son." And in reference to God it was said by our Lord himself, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." And elsewhere we find it repeatedly recorded of Christ, by immediate communication from heaven, that he was "the well-beloved Son of God." We find, then, that God himself addressed Abraham, in reference to Isaac, in the very language which was afterwards employed to set forth the divine love as manifested in giving up Christ to the death; and none who are familiar with that language can fail to perceive, that the transaction recorded in this chapter is one of the most vivid and striking representations to be found in Scripture of the great and glorious scheme of redemption. And herein, I conceive, consisted the peculiar honour that was put upon Abraham. He was honoured to represent, as no man before or after him ever represented, the wonderful love of God in not sparing His own Son, but giving Him up for us all; and on this ground, which is too sacred to dwell upon, he was called the "father of the faithful" and the "friend of God." And if, then, the chief part of the transaction narrated in this chapter was designed to typify and set forth the plan of redemption, we may safely infer that all the circumstances connected with it had a reference to the same great subject, and that Abraham spoke as he was moved by the Holy Ghost, and spoke, moreover, of Christ, when he said to Isaac,—"My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt-offering."

But the place, also, where this singular transaction occurred favours the same idea. It was, we are told, one of the mountains in the land of Moriah; and in the third chapter of 2 Chronicles, we are informed that it was on Mount Moriah that Solomon built the house of the Lord at Jerusalem. The place, then, which God did afterwards choose, from among all the tribes of Israel, to put his name there, was, if not the very spot, at least

in the immediate neighbourhood of the place on which Isaac was offered, and where, by the immediate interposition of God, a substitute was provided in his stead. And whether the mount on which Abraham built an altar whereon to offer up Isaac his son, was the same as that on which the temple was afterwards built, and to which the name Moriah seems to have been latterly restricted,—or whether it was Mount Calvary, which was at no great distance from the other, and on which the Son of God was actually offered a sacrifice to take away sin,—the name which Abraham gave to the place was sufficiently significant when he called it "Jehovah-jireh," "The Lord will provide,"—inasmuch as he did thereby foretell the coming of Him who filled the temple with his glory, as it had never before been filled, and who on Mount Calvary displayed the divine perfections as they could not otherwise be displayed. And He was the Lamb of God's own providing; for when there was no eye to pity, and no hand to help, the Lord himself pitied, and his own hand brought salvation; he laid our help on One who was mighty to save. And hence the apostle denominates the righteousness which Christ wrought out, and on the ground of which sinners are justified, God's righteousness, — not only because it was the righteousness of a divine person, of Him who was the only begotten and well-beloved Son of God, God manifest in the flesh, but also because it was a righteousness which God the Father provided, when he sent forth his Son to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, that God might be just, and yet the justifier of him who believeth in Jesus. This truth might be illustrated by a reference to many passages of Scripture, where the wonderful plan of redemption through the blood of Christ, as the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world, is traced to the love and wisdom of the Father; and nowhere, therefore, in the Old Testament, was Christ more clearly foretold, or his substitution in the stead of the guilty more distinctly set forth, than when Abraham called the place where he had offered Isaac "Jehovah-jireh," "The Lord will provide."

This prediction has long ago been fulfilled. God has provided himself a Lamb for a burnt-offering; and in the place where the prediction was uttered, there was in due time shed that blood which cleanseth from all sin. And herein we enjoy

advantages above those of Abraham himself. How, then, will our faith bear a comparison with his? None, I believe, will be able to put this question seriously to themselves, without feeling convinced that they have great reason to be humbled and abased. Abraham, no doubt, saw the day of Christ; for so it is testified of him by Christ himself. But he saw it only afar off, and must, therefore, have seen it but dimly, compared with the full revelation of the day itself, when "the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among" men, ("and" they "beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth,"—when all the mysterious predictions of the Old Testament prophets concerning him were fulfilled, and were seen to harmonise in his person, being at once the Son of God and the Son of man,—being the Prince of life, the Lord of glory, and, at the same time, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief,—being crucified in weakness, as if he had no power to resist, and, nevertheless, declared to be the Son of God with power by his resurrection from the dead.

The subject of Christ's person, and character, and mediatorial work, considered as a subject of mere knowledge, a matter of intellect or understanding, is now more fully unfolded to any child who has been instructed in the most elementary truths of Christianity, than we have reason to suppose it was to Abraham, who, like the other prophets, did no doubt long for the fulfilment of what he saw only in prophetic vision. Yet,—even with his imperfect apprehension of the manner in which the seed of the woman was to bruise the head of the serpent, and how in his seed all the families of the earth were to be blessed,—Abraham's faith in this promise, and his reliance upon it as the ground of his own personal acceptance with God, had reached such a state of strength and maturity, and had awakened in his mind such entire confidence in the wisdom, power, and faithfulness of God, as his reconciled God, his shield, and his exceeding great reward, that at the divine bidding he did without hesitation or delay proceed to offer up his only son in sacrifice. Such an act of obedience could have been performed only by one who was assured of his being in a state of favour and reconciliation with God, and who placed the most implicit confidence in the grace and wisdom, as well as in the rectitude of every one of the

divine commandments. No doubt, the very transaction connected with the offering up of Isaac might, and I believe did, prove the means of throwing new light on the divine purpose of saving sinners by an atoning Sacrifice, and we can easily suppose that a great accession was thereby made to Abraham's knowledge of that wonderful plan. But we are never to forget that, previously to this new revelation of the divine purpose, the patriarch had begun and carried on his act of obedience to the divine commandment, till, by the same authority, his hand was arrested. Abraham, therefore, did not proceed to offer up Isaac for the purpose of gaining the divine favour, or with the view of resting on that act of obedience as the ground of his acceptance with God. It was because he had the assured confidence of being already reconciled to God that he was enabled to obey the command.

And why is it, then, that professing believers now, with so much clearer views of the way of a sinner's acceptance, are so much inferior to Abraham in respect of the strength of their faith and the cheerfulness of their obedience? It is because, though they know more of the truth as addressed merely to the intellect or understanding, they do not so cordially acquiesce in the principle on which God pardons the guilty. "Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness." He valued the divine favour above all things; and he was willing to be received into that favour in any way and on any terms that God was pleased to prescribe. Every word, therefore, which God spoke to him was received with profound reverence, —every promise that was made to him was implicitly confided in,—every command which was laid upon him was instantly and cheerfully obeyed. And so it must be with all who would experience, as Abraham did, the encouragement and consolation designed to be conveyed by the gracious assurance, "The Lord will provide." This assurance would be abundantly welcome to all, did it mean that God will certainly interpose to deliver them from every thing that they feel to be painful and disagreeable, and provide for them every thing that they would desire to enjoy. But no such unqualified promise ever was or ever will be given. He has engaged to provide only in the way and to the extent that He sees to be wise, and right, and good. But

this will be enough for those who are interested in the righteousness of Christ, and to whom that righteousness is the one thing needful. With that, they are assured, they will receive all other things; and they leave it to the wisdom of their heavenly Father to determine the way and the measure in which these are to be bestowed.

If, therefore, we would experience all the confidence and security which is intended to be conveyed by the assurance that God will provide, and if we would be enabled to commit cheerfully to his disposal all that concerns our temporal lot, we must seek to have satisfactory evidence of our personal interest in the righteousness which has been provided for our justification in his sight. Till we see and can come to God as our Father in Christ, reconciling us unto himself, not imputing unto us our trespasses, we can have no filial confidence in committing to him our temporal interests, and no satisfaction in realising his presence in all places, and recognising his hand in all events. But he is so revealing himself to all, and he is entreating all, without exception, that they will be reconciled to him. Let it be our great concern, then, to see that we have accepted his invitation, —and having done so,—having found peace through the blood of the Cross,—let us hold fast the beginning of our confidence, that we may never be moved away from the hope of the Gospel. And in proportion as our hope is lively, our obedience will be cheerful, and our submission to the divine will unreserved. We shall feel growing satisfaction and delight in tracing the hand of God in all his dispensations towards us, and in all our trials and difficulties we shall be enabled with more and more confidence to say, "The Lord will provide."

XIV.

DEATH OF ABRAHAM.

GENESIS XXV. 8.

THE history and the character of Abraham are alike interesting, and it may not be an unprofitable exercise to take a short review of both. His history, including the events that befell him, and the divine communications which were vouchsafed to him, must always be full of interest to believers, as containing a gradual development of the great plan of redemption, and as showing that, even from the beginning, the person, character, and work of Christ formed the grand subject of all the divine communications to the children of men. And, in like manner, the personal character and conduct of the patriarch are full of instruction, as furnishing an example of what a single individual may be honoured to accomplish in the way of testifying for God, and maintaining the cause of truth and righteousness in the midst of a sinful and perverse generation. And these views of the patriarch's life and character are very naturally suggested by the simple narrative related in the passage before us, where it is said of him that he "gave up the ghost, and died in a good old age, an old man, and full of years; and was gathered to his people."

It is said by an apostle, in reference to the Old Testament prophets, in and by whom the Holy Spirit "testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow," that "unto" them "it was revealed, that not unto themselves,

but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported by them that have preached the gospel with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven." The plain meaning of this statement is, that when the prophets of old predicted the coming of Christ, and the glorious consequences of his finished work, they were given to understand that the communications made to them were not designed solely, or even chiefly, for their own personal interest; but that they were mainly intended for the edification of the Church in these latter days, when, being fully accomplished, they furnish illustrations of the great and glorious scheme of redemption, which were and would be but imperfectly understood by those who were commissioned to announce them. "They inquired," we are told, "and searched diligently of whom, and of what time it was, that the Spirit of Christ that was in them did signify," and did prompt them to speak, when they predicted the glorious events of Christ's mediatorial work. But it was intimated or revealed to them, that it was for the sake of the Church in future times, as well as for themselves, that they were thus moved by the Holy Ghost to speak; and that although they understood enough of what they so predicted to keep alive their own faith and hope, it was to the future generations of God's people that they were chiefly appointed to minister. And from the nature of the communications which were made to them, it could not be otherwise; inasmuch as these communications, being conveyed in figurative language or symbolical representation, to which there attached more or less obscurity, contained a depth of meaning which would be fully unfolded only when Christ, who was the subject of them all, was actually revealed, God manifest in the flesh.

But the apostle's statement regarding the prophets means a great deal more than merely that their knowledge of what they foretold was necessarily very limited, compared with what their predictions would convey to the Church in the last days. He plainly intimates that they were satisfied with this ordination,—that they were contented to be the honoured instruments of ministering spiritual light and joy to future generations, in larger abundance than they had themelves experienced,—and that they looked forward with earnest and confident expectation to the time when all that they foretold was to be accomplished, re-

joicing to think that what to themselves was wrapt in mystery and partial darkness would then be disclosed to the Church in all its glory. This was said, and of course was true, of the prophets generally. But it appears pre-eminently applicable to Abraham, of whom it may be said, as it can be perhaps of no other man, that he lived not for himself but for posterity,—even for the Church of all subsequent times. The substance of all the promises which he received was a future and a very distant thing,—nay, the various events by means of which these promises were to be fulfilled were themselves so distant and widely separated, that the interest which they awakened and the influence which they exercised on his motives and principles of action might have been expected to be very slight. When he arrived in Canaan,—the land where God had promised to make him a great nation, and to bless him, and make his name great,—he was told that his posterity were for many generations to be strangers both there and in another land, and for a long period in a state of bondage and oppression, and that it was only after the lapse of four hundred years that they were to get possession of the promised inheritance. As we know human nature to be in its fallen state, we might suppose that the condition of Abraham's posterity at the distance of four centuries was not likely to be a matter of deep or anxious concern with him. But it was so deeply interesting and important in his estimation, as a necessary step towards the fulfilment of the great promise that in him all the families of the earth should be blessed, that the whole tenor of his life was regulated and directed by it. For a long time his anxiety was how the promise could be fulfilled at all, seeing he was childless; and when this subject of anxiety was at an end, his great concern was how he might awaken and keep alive in Isaac's mind the same interest in the divine promises, and the same confidence in their fulfilment, which he had himself felt and manifested. And this anxiety was especially exhibited towards the close of his life in the matter of his son's marriage, as recorded in the preceding chapter. We are there told that Abraham charged his confidential servant, who ruled over all that he had, and made him solemnly swear that he would not take a wife to Isaac of the daughters of the Canaanites among whom he dwelt, —obviously because he foresaw the disastrous consequences that

might flow from such an alliance with the idolatrous inhabitants of Canaan,—but that he would go to Abraham's own kindred, and take a wife thence for Isaac.

But the point to which I would especially refer, as manifesting Abraham's deep interest as well as confidence in the fulfilment of the divine promises, was his solemn charge to his steward not to carry Isaac back from Canaan to the land from which the patriarch had himself come. The servant, on receiving instructions to go to Abraham's native country, to bring thence a wife for his son, started the very natural objection that he might not perhaps succeed in his mission, and as naturally asked, whether in that case he was to take Isaac back to the patriarch's country, seeing he was strictly prohibited from forming an alliance with the inhabitants of Canaan. "The servant said unto him, Peradventure the woman will not be willing to follow me unto this land: must I needs bring thy son again unto the land from whence thou camest?" Abraham, regarding such a step on the part of Isaac as a virtual violation of the covenant, and a renunciation of the promises of God, answered, evidently with great promptitude and energy, "Beware thou that thou bring not my son thither again;" and then, taking refuge from the fear of such a disappointment in the grace and faithfulness of God, which he had already so largely experienced, he expresses himself as if he thought it almost impossible that his servant could be unsuccessful in the mission on which he was about to send him. "The Lord God of heaven," said he, "which took me from my father's house, and from the land of my kindred, and which spake unto me, and that sware unto me, saying, Unto thy seed will I give this land; he shall send his angel before thee, and thou shalt take a wife unto my son from thence." But Abraham had already seen many mysterious things in God's dealings with him; and however necessary his own scheme might appear to be for the accomplishment of the divine promises to his posterity, it was still a possible thing that God might set it aside for one of his own choosing, and therefore a wiser and a better. Abraham, therefore, was prepared to bow to the divine appointment, if that should prove to be contrary to his plan. But, at all events, Isaac was not to be removed from Canaan; for that would have been to relinquish all interest in the cove-

nant which God had graciously sworn to the patriarch. "If the woman," said Abraham, "will not be willing to follow thee, then thou shalt be clear from this my oath: only bring not my son thither again."

Such was the deep interest which Abraham manifested in the occurrence of events and the fulfilment of promises which could not take effect for hundreds of years after he was gathered to his people. But they were events and promises which related to the manifestation of the divine glory and the best interests of men. Though he, therefore, could not live to witness them, yet they were to him the most interesting of all the subjects that could occupy his thoughts; and he found his highest gratification in being instrumental, in any way, or to any extent, in keeping alive the faith and the hope of the Church concerning them, or in being made the honoured channel of such communications as would at last contribute to the brighter and more glorious display of the divine character, and especially of the marvellous scheme of redemption. And if Abraham's history had furnished nothing more than such an example of devotedness to God and charity towards man, it would have been of incalculable value to all his spiritual children in every subsequent age. But that history was destined to occupy a higher place still, among the means which God was pleased to employ for gradually revealing his great plan of mercy for the salvation of his Church. In the express communications which were vouchsafed to the patriarch on the subject of the Covenant of Grace, large additions were made to the intimations previously given of the Saviour, the seed of the woman, who was to bruise the serpent's head; for we have only to compare the revelation which had been made to the Church at the time of Abraham's call, with what it was at his death, to perceive that the patriarch left his son in possession of many promises and of much knowledge on the one great subject, which he did not himself possess till he was called to leave his country, and his kindred, and his father's house. No doubt, the Church had from the beginning been in possession of the promise which contains the sum and substance of the Gospel,—a promise of which all future revelations concerning Christ were but so many illustrations. But the fulfilment of this promise was expressly fixed in Abraham's family; it

was confirmed to him, and to his seed after him, by solemn covenant; it was sealed to him, also, and to all his believing offspring, by the sacrament of circumcision; and of Isaac it was expressly declared that he was to be the heir of the promise,—or, in other words, that in him, or in his seed, all the families of the earth were to be blessed.

In the course of Abraham's life, then, great progress was made in the gradual revelation of the Covenant of Grace, the scheme of redemption through a Saviour. The faith and the hope of the Church were directed to the patriarch's family, as that in which was one day to appear the great Deliverer; and in the promise of certain temporal blessings, which was vouchsafed to the same family, large provision was made for the encouragement of that faith and hope; inasmuch as the continued fulfilment of this last promise, namely, the promise of temporal blessings to Abraham's seed, was a continued pledge to the people of God, Abraham's spiritual children, that the great promise was not forgotten, and would not be falsified. Abraham, therefore, bequeathed to Isaac and to his immediate descendants an inheritance unspeakably richer than all his worldly possessions, even a revelation of the divine purposes respecting the salvation of the Church, clearer and more definite than any that had previously been vouchsafed; and we cannot doubt that this consideration served to soothe the patriarch in his last moments, and enabled him to close his eyes in the assured hope, that the day which he had seen afar off, and in which he rejoiced, would arrive; and that he had witnessed the commencement of a series of events which were to terminate in spreading joy and gladness among all the families of the earth.

These communications were such as Abraham himself and his immediate descendants might to a very great extent understand, as clearer and more definite predictions of Christ, and of the way of salvation through him, than had been enjoyed by the saints of any former period. The benefit, therefore, of these communications was enjoyed by the patriarch himself in common with all believers who have come after him. But it was not by these direct and plain revelations alone that the history of the patriarch has been made the means of testifying of Christ, and of the glory that was to follow his sufferings and death.

Abraham was honoured to bear this testimony in a way of which he was himself, perhaps, to a great extent, unconscious; for in many respects the patriarch was a very obvious and striking type of Christ. The various points on which this typical resemblance holds have been enumerated by commentators, and must have occurred to every devout reader who sits down to the perusal of the Scriptures with the conviction that Christ is the main subject of all that is there revealed,—that "the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."

When God called and chose Abraham, and commanded him to go out as a pilgrim and a stranger, but at the same time promised him a seed numerous as the stars of heaven,—gave him the victory over kings,—secured to his seed the possession of Canaan,—honoured him with the title of the friend of God,—and made him the heir of the world;—the patriarch, in all probability, did not imagine that there was in all or in any of these circumstances a typical prediction of Him to whose advent he was looking forward with joy and gladness. Yet who can read them now without being reminded of Him who is emphatically the called or chosen one of God, even the elect in whom his soul delighteth,—who, in obedience to the Father's will, became a pilgrim and a stranger on the earth, even "a stranger to his brethren, and an alien to his mother's children," but who nevertheless received the promise of a kingdom, such as should raise him higher than the kings of the earth,—a seed, too, more numerous than the dew-drops of the morning,—and an inheritance that should include all things, even the heirship of the world? In like manner, when we read of the covenant which God, in his sovereign grace and mercy, condescended to make with Abraham, whereby he promised and made over to Abraham's seed the land of Canaan,—a land flowing with milk and honey,—our thoughts naturally turn to that Covenant of Grace which God entered into with Christ, and by which there is secured to all who believe in him, even the children whom God has given him, an inheritance in the heavenly Canaan,—"an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away." And, finally, when we contemplate that most marvellous of all the events and transactions of Abraham's life, namely, his offering up Isaac in obedience to the divine command,—when we reflect

that Isaac was not only his son, but, in a very peculiar sense, his only son, the son whom he loved,—that this son was to him as dead for three days, being the time that elapsed between his receiving the command to offer him, and his arrival at the place where the command was to be executed,—and that when he was exempted from the trial, and his son was spared to him, so that he received him as it were from the dead,—it is impossible for us to avoid seeing in all this a typical representation of that great and marvellous transaction in which God gave up his only begotten and well-beloved Son to the death, under the power of which he remained for three days, when by his resurrection he was declared to be the Son of God with power.

How far Abraham saw in this, or in other events of his history, any thing typical or prophetic of the person, character, and work of Christ, we cannot determine; though, if it was revealed to him, that by the divine dispensations towards him, he was to minister to the light, and knowledge, and joy of the Church in future ages, we can conceive that he regarded all these dispensations as comprehending a great deal more than he clearly understood, and that he rejoiced in the prospect of the time when they would be fully explained, and would serve to unfold to the admiration of the Church the riches of redeeming grace and mercy. But whatever might be the extent to which the patriarch understood what was thus shadowed forth, it is plain that, besides the express communications which he received, and which plainly foretold the coming of the Saviour, there were embodied typically in the personal history of Abraham all the leading facts of the Saviour's mediatorial work. The Christian, therefore, cannot open the history of the patriarch without finding Christ in every page, in almost every sentence; and while he sees, even in the most minute circumstances of the life of that remarkable person, something to remind him of the Redeemer, he cannot fail to derive from it a deeper and a more affecting sense of the grace and condescension of God, in having so ordered and arranged his dispensations towards mankind, through a long succession of ages, that they all pointed to Christ, and all bore testimony to the precious truth that he is the only and all-sufficient Saviour. It is especially true, therefore, of Abraham, as it is of all the prophets, that not unto himself,

but unto us he did minister the things which are now reported unto us by them that have preached the gospel with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into.

I need hardly remark, that after what we have seen of the patriarch's history, and of the illustrations it affords of the great plan of salvation, it might well and truly be said of him, whatever were the years of his life, that he died in a good old age,—inasmuch as he was honoured to make in the course of his life a very large contribution to the comfort, the encouragement, and the edification of the Church in all subsequent ages. But it is worthy of observation, as inculcating a very instructive lesson, that while the day of Christ, which he saw, though afar off, was that which occupied the chief place in his heart, and comforted him under all his trials, it quickened him also to active and zealous exertions in the way of serving his own day and generation. In doing so he had many difficulties to encounter, and much discouragement to contend with; for not only had the people around him already lapsed far towards idolatry, but he was told by express communication from Heaven, that after a certain period the inhabitants of Canaan would be found to have filled up the measure of their iniquity, so that the execution of the divine judgments upon them would be no longer delayed. This revelation not only implied that the people, even then, were sinking into wickedness, but plainly intimated that their downward course was to be progressive, and that no warnings or admonitions would be effectual in arresting them in their career, and turning them to God. The patriarch, therefore, might have been tempted to conclude that he was not required to engage in so hopeless a work as that of endeavouring to reclaim the people among whom he sojourned. But this was not his rule of duty. He had himself experienced too much of the grace and mercy of God to allow him to remain indifferent or unconcerned about the condition of those around him; and, therefore, in spite of all the apparent hopelessness of the work, he ceased not to testify for God in opposition to the prevailing abominations of idolatry. Nor are there wanting proofs that his labours were, to a considerable extent, blessed with success. The language in which he was addressed by the sons of Heth,

when they said, "Hear us, my lord; thou art a mighty prince," or a prince of God, "among us," plainly showed that Abraham's character carried with it great moral weight, and could not therefore fail of exercising a salutary influence on those with whom he held intercourse. And with regard to his own household and more immediate dependents, it was said of him by God himself, "I know him." We have a very striking example of his success in teaching them to know, and fear, and confide in the only living and true God, in the person of the oldest servant of his house, who ruled over all that he had; for in the matter of his mission to the land of Abraham's nativity, from which he was to bring a wife to Isaac, we find that individual manifesting a strength of confidence in the grace and faithfulness of God which was scarcely exceeded by the faith of the patriarch himself. We know not, therefore, how much of the long respite of four hundred years, which was granted to the inhabitants of Canaan, might be owing to the holy example of Abraham, operating, by the divine blessing, in arresting the progress of irreligion and immorality. At all events, we cannot doubt that such was the patriarch's earnest desire.

And herein is the example which all his spiritual children are required to imitate. All of them have their own sphere within which they can do something, in one way or another, towards furthering the cause of Christ, the extension of the kingdom of grace. And if they would do so with any degree of cheerfulness and vigour, let them seek to have their minds deeply impressed, as Abraham's was, with the conviction that in Christ all the families of the earth shall assuredly be blessed. The faith of this truth was the mainspring of all Abraham's submission to the will and devotedness to the service of God,—was that which sustained him in the midst of all discouragement, and filled him with confidence and good hope, when otherwise he would have desponded. And such will be the effect of the same truth wherever it is felt to be of all objects the most interesting, and where its certainty is undoubted. And how much more powerfully may not the prospect of the universal spread of the Gospel be expected to operate now, than it did in the time of the patriarch? for slow as its progress in some respects may appear to have hitherto been, yet what an accumulation of evidence has

been given since Abraham's day of the faithfulness of the divine promises, and what a multitude of tokens and assurances that the time will come when all the families of the earth shall be blessed in Jesus? If Abraham, therefore, did against hope believe in hope that he was to be the father of many nations, can Christians give way to any feeling of doubt or distrust as to the ultimate triumph of the Gospel? And after witnessing the fulfilment of promises so numerous, and the occurrence of events once so unlikely, can they regard any obstacle as insurmountable which stands in the way of the ingathering into the fold of the Good Shepherd of the scattered sheep of Israel, God's ancient people, together with the fulness of the Gentile nations? And if they feel that this object is very dear to them, and if they believe that it will assuredly be accomplished, how should it animate and encourage them to labour according to their means and opportunities for helping it on? And if they are but earnest in prayer, and ready to embrace every occasion that offers for promoting the spiritual welfare of their fellow-men, they know not what they may be the means of accomplishing, though their sphere be limited and their life short. At all events, when their life comes to a close, they will feel that it has been long or short, according as they have or have not spent it for God; and if, at last, they have the testimony of their conscience that it was their main object to honour him, and to serve their day and generation, then, whatever may be the amount of usefulness with which he honoured them, the reward of grace will be sure, "Well done, good and faithful servants, enter ye into the joy of your Lord." "Whatever, therefore, their hand findeth to do, let them do it with all their might, seeing there is no wisdom, nor knowledge, nor device in the grave, whither they are going."

XV.

ISAAC AND THE BLESSING.

GENESIS XXVII. 1-5.

BEFORE proceeding to consider the command of Isaac, as stated in the verses now referred to, and the events which followed thereon, I would advert for a little to the history of the patriarch previous to the period here spoken of. It appears from that history, as recorded in the preceding chapter, that though, like Abraham, he was but a pilgrim and a stranger in the land of Canaan, yet he experienced few of the severer trials which his father had endured, and comparatively little of such affliction and vicissitude as his son Jacob afterwards underwent. It is recorded, that "his father Abraham gave unto him all that he possessed,"—that "after his father's death, God blessed him,"—and that, during a famine that was in the land, instead of going down to Egypt, as Abraham had been obliged to do on a similar occasion, he was expressly commanded to sojourn in the land of Abimelech, king of the Philistines, itself a part of Canaan, where we are told of him, that "he sowed in that land, and received in the same year an hundred-fold: and the Lord blessed him. And the man waxed great, and went forward, and grew until he became very great: for he had possession of flocks, and possession of herds, and great store of servants: and the Philistines envied him." This envy or jealousy they manifested by stopping, and filling with earth, "the wells which his father's servants had digged in the days of Abraham his father,"—and in various

other ways so annoying him, that after moving from place to place, in hope of being permitted to sojourn, for a time at least, in peace and quietness, he was compelled to leave their territory, and to take up his abode beyond the reach of Abimelech's people to disturb him. He was thus, no doubt, reminded, and very impressively too, that he was but a stranger and a sojourner as his father had been; and that he must lay his account with bearing, from time to time, some of the ills incident to a state of pilgrimage.

But, amidst all these trials, and especially on the occasion to which I more immediately refer, he was sustained and comforted by very express assurances of divine support, and very large communications of divine grace. The same night on which he took up his abode at Beer-sheba, beyond the reach of those subjects of Abimelech who had annoyed and persecuted him, "The Lord appeared unto him, and said, I am the God of Abraham thy father: fear not, for I am with thee, and will bless thee, and multiply thy seed for my servant Abraham's sake." And, in addition to this, he had the clearest evidence that, notwithstanding all the annoyance which he had experienced, God had laid the fear of him and the dread of him upon those among whom he sojourned: for we are farther told, that Abimelech went to him with one of his friends, and with the chief captain of his army, and that when "Isaac said unto them, Wherefore come ye to me, seeing ye hate me, and have sent me away from you?" he received this very remarkable answer, "We saw certainly that the Lord was with thee: and we said, Let there be now an oath betwixt us, even betwixt us and thee, and let us make a covenant with thee; that thou wilt do us no hurt, as we have not touched thee, and as we have done unto thee nothing but good, and have sent thee away in peace: thou art now the blessed of the Lord." He was thus assured, that though he had experienced vexation and trouble at the hand of some of Abimelech's subjects, yet Abimelech himself and his chief men regarded him with awe, as being under the special guardianship of the God whom he served; and that thus he had been the means of conveying to their minds impressions of reverence and fear for the only living and true God. This consideration was more than enough to compensate for all the inconveniences which he suf-

fered during the time of his sojourning among the Philistines; and we may conclude, that though called to no very arduous undertaking, neither exposed to any very severe trials, he continued, by his steadfast adherence to the worship of the true God, and by the growing prosperity wherewith the divine bounty blessed him, to be a testimony to the being and sovereignty of the God of Abraham as the only living and true God.

But though it would appear that Isaac's life was comparatively quiet and undisturbed, we must bear in mind that, at a very early period, he was subjected to a trial of peculiar severity, —one which far outweighed a lifetime of ordinary trials. I refer to the solemn transaction on Mount Moriah, when, bound by a father's hand, he lay down upon the altar, and by the same hand was ready to be slain, and presented as a burnt-offering unto God. What Isaac's feeling was at that trying moment, and with what sentiments he heard the appalling intelligence that he was himself the lamb for the burnt-offering, which he had travelled so far to offer, the sacred historian has not informed us. But it is plain, I think, from the whole narrative, that however alarming the unexpected proposal might be to him, he did, nevertheless, acquiesce in it as the authoritative command of God,—that God whom he had been taught from his infancy to honour and revere. It was testified of Abraham by God himself,—"I know him that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord to do justice and judgment." Isaac, therefore, must have been carefully trained up in the knowledge and worship of the true God; and that he was familiar with the solemn act and design of sacrifice is evident from the question which he put to his father,—"Behold the fire and the wood; but where is the lamb for a burnt-offering?" Though the trial, therefore, was a terrible one, not only as calling him to meet immediate and unexpected death, accompanied with circumstances the most repulsive to human nature, but as contradicting to all appearance every thing that he had heard from his father respecting God's gracious purposes and promises concerning himself, he did nevertheless submit to it as the express and authoritative command of God; and thus, in so far as his submission to the divine will and his devotedness to

the divine glory were concerned, these were tried as no subsequent affliction of a worldly nature could ever try them.

By that transaction he was marked and set apart as a person in an especial manner devoted to God; and we should naturally expect to find that his future character would give some indication of those feelings which the recollection of that event could never fail to revive. And that it did so is evident, I think, from the few facts recorded respecting him. We cannot peruse his history without feeling the impression that he was a man of a grave and contemplative character,—little inclined towards any very active or enterprising pursuit,—living habitually in the faith and hope of the promise given to Abraham,—and walking humbly and softly, like one who had been solemnly dedicated to God. His affection for his mother, as well as his love of domestic life, is incidentally, but very expressively brought out, when it is said of him that "he took Rebekah, and brought her into his mother Sarah's tent, and she became his wife, and he loved her; and he was comforted after his mother's death." His continued submission to his father's authority was strikingly manifested in the matter of his marriage, wherein he plainly declared that he regarded the whole arrangement mainly with a view to the fulfilment of the divine promise and the advancement of the divine glory. And his devout frame of mind is very clearly set forth when it is said of him, just as an habitual custom might be supposed to be spoken of, that "he went out to meditate," or pray, "in the field at the even-tide."

Such appears to have been the general character of Isaac; and it is peculiarly interesting as an example of early piety, to which I would call the attention of the young. It may be alleged, indeed, that after such a trial as Isaac underwent,—after being delivered, when by the express command of God he had been doomed to die,—it was not wonderful that he should all his life after manifest deadness to the world, and a lively apprehension of the reality of those spiritual and eternal things which he had once felt to be his all. But I would remind my young friends, that Isaac's piety and devotedness to God did not begin with or spring out of that trial. It was because he knew, and feared, and loved God that he was enabled to meet and to endure the trial; and though, when it was over,

all his holy principles were thereby greatly strengthened and matured, still these principles were in his heart before the trial came, and prepared him to meet it without resistance and without a murmur. Indeed, he had been given up to God, solemnly and deliberately given up, in the ordinance of circumcision, long before the transaction to which I have been referring; and we cannot doubt that it was by means of the obligation thereby laid upon him, and explained and inculcated by his father, that he was made to feel that he was not his own,—that he had been given to God,—and that he was bound to glorify God whether by life or by death.

And is not this the very obligation that is laid on every child of Christian parents who has received the holy rite of baptism? In that rite they received a seal of the Covenant of Grace, whereby Christ makes over and confirms to every one who believes in him all the blessings of his salvation; and by that rite they engage to be his,—acknowledging that they are not their own,—that Christ has bought them with his own blood,—and that they are bound to glorify him in their bodies and in their spirits, which are his. Wherein, then, does their condition differ from that of Isaac? They have no more right than he had to throw off their obligation to live to God, or to delay determining whether they will accept the blessings of which baptism is the sign and seal. God is graciously waiting for that determination; and by every admonition which they receive from parents or others, he is urging them to come to it without delay. The moment they do come to it, receiving and resting on Christ alone for salvation, and resolving in his strength to live as he would have them to live, then baptism becomes to them a pledge of their personal interest in all the blessings of the Redeemer's purchase. But as long as they delay doing so, because they are unwilling to relinquish some sins and follies which would be inconsistent with a life of piety and godliness, or because they think it too early so to give themselves to God, from some vague idea that they would thereby be brought under some painful and unreasonable restraints, they are virtually rejecting all the blessings of Christ's salvation, and treating them as matters of secondary concern.

But I would ask them whether they can suppose that Isaac

ever repented of his choice when he chose the God of his father as his God, believing that God's favour was life, and his loving-kindness better than life? And if he had not made this choice, how would he have met the trial which awaited him, and which might have been appointed whether he had made the choice or not? They never will, indeed, be subjected to precisely the same trial. But they may be destined to an early death, as every day's experience does most solemnly warn them. And surely the very possibility of such an event, in whatever way or by whatever means it may take place, does very loudly warn them against delaying to seek the Lord; while they are encouraged by the gracious assurance that if they do seek him, he will be found of them. Let them be persuaded, therefore, to remember their Creator in the days of their youth, before the evil days come, and the years draw nigh wherein they shall say that they have no pleasure in them.

But though Isaac thus manifested a very striking example of early piety, and though the general tenor of his future life accorded therewith, yet like all other, even the holiest men, he was chargeable with weaknesses and sins which have been faithfully recorded, and from which much salutary instruction may be drawn. Like Abraham his father, and under the influence of the same sinful distrust, we find him dissembling concerning his wife while sojourning among the Philistines, though God had appeared to him and expressly said, "Go not down into Egypt; dwell in the land which I shall tell thee of. Sojourn in this land, and I will be with thee, and will bless thee; for unto thee, and unto thy seed, will I give all these countries." For this instance of distrust in the divine faithfulness, he received a very humbling reproof at the hand of Abimelech, king of the Philistines; and I doubt not he saw a farther rebuke of his sin in the harassing annoyances which he suffered on the part of some of Abimelech's people.

But Isaac was chargeable with another sin, in his undue partiality for his eldest son, Esau,—a sin which proved a snare to other members of his family, and was followed by very painful consequences. "Isaac," we are told, "loved Esau, because he did eat of his venison; but Rebekah loved Jacob." These few words convey a great deal of information respecting the state of

Isaac's household, and naturally lead us to conclude that there must at times have been manifestations of a division among the members thereof, very unseemly in any case, but particularly so in that of Isaac. But it is in the chapter before us that the sin of both parents is brought fully out to view with all its disastrous consequences, where we find Isaac determined to bestow on Esau his dying blessing. "Behold now, I am old, I know not the day of my death: now therefore take, I pray thee, thy weapons, thy quiver and thy bow, and go out to the field, and take me some venison; and make me savoury meat, such as I love, and bring it to me; that my soul may bless thee before I die."

It may perhaps appear, at first sight, that there was nothing in this determination of Isaac which could be regarded as very sinful, beyond the weakness of wishing to eat of his son's venison, and uniting with that the solemn act of giving him his dying blessing. We must bear in mind, however, that this dying blessing was a matter of infinite importance, connected with the fulfilment of a divine purpose, and was not, therefore, to be pronounced lightly, or without a divine warrant. It appears, not only from the case before us, but from various others recorded in the Old Testament, that, by divine appointment, the promise made to Abraham, with all the blessings and privileges which it involved, was suspended, so to speak, on the dying benediction of the patriarch, and was conveyed by that benediction,—so that the blessing being pronounced, a determination was thereby given to the inheritance of the promise in favour of the individual so blessed, to the exclusion of every other; that is to say, the possession of Canaan, and the descent of Christ according to the flesh, were absolutely restricted to the posterity of him on whom the blessing was pronounced. So distinctly, indeed, was this understood, and so certainly was this believed, that, in the case before us, all the parties concerned, as we shall immediately see, even Isaac, Rebekah, Esau, and Jacob, proceeded on the principle, that the fulfilment of the promise would infallibly accompany the paternal benediction; nay, so thoroughly were they convinced of this, that some of them were contented to secure the blessing even by fraud; and when it was so obtained, the others were persuaded that it could not be reversed.

Of course, we are not to suppose that the patriarch possessed any power in himself to dispose of the blessings comprehended in the Abrahamic Covenant, or that there was any such virtue in the blessings which he pronounced as could of itself secure to the son whom he blessed the privileges of that covenant. He spoke under the guidance of the spirit of prophecy. He acted merely as the instrument or channel of communication by which God was pleased to make known his purposes to the heirs of promise. And as if to demonstrate more clearly how entirely the patriarch was dependent on divine sovereignty, we shall find that he did actually convey the promise to one son, while he wished and designed it for another. Still, however, there was an inseparable connection between the benediction and the disposal of the promise with all its blessings, so that the former did infallibly and unalterably fix the determination of the latter; and while there was hereby furnished a striking proof of Isaac's faith in the reality and value of the blessings promised, there was also afforded by it a melancholy example of his weakness and his sin, in seeking to dispose of the blessing according to his own partialities and prepossessions,—"Make me savoury meat, such as I love, and bring it to me; that my soul may bless thee before I die."

Such was Isaac's command to Esau, and in that command he might be supposed to be putting Esau's affection to the proof, —to know whether he still retained the feeling of love which had so often gratified his father; for Esau was a cunning hunter, a man of the field, and Isaac loved him because he did eat of his venison. There might, therefore, be nothing in this very culpable, considered in itself; inasmuch as if Esau still proved an obedient and affectionate son, Isaac might be willing to believe, as parents usually are, that every thing else was right with him. Esau, moreover, was the eldest son; and it appears that from the beginning, even from the time of Cain and Abel, there did attach to the first-born, and that by divine appointment, peculiar privileges; so that unless there was some special intimation from God to the contrary, the eldest son was to have the excellency or pre-eminence. On these accounts, it was natural enough for Isaac to wish that Esau might inherit the blessing. But he adhered to his purpose of bestowing that

blessing upon Esau, in opposition to repeated and most unequivocal intimations that such was not the divine will. Of the two brothers, who were twins, it had been declared by the Lord to Rebekah, their mother, before they were born, "that the elder should serve the younger;" at their birth, it is recorded of the youngest that he took hold of his brother's heel,—an intimation that he was one day to supplant or displace him, and from which he was named Jacob, signifying a supplanter; and at a later period, Esau voluntarily relinquished his birthright and all its privileges,—selling it to Jacob for a mess of pottage.

It can hardly be supposed that Isaac was ignorant of these things, and he had therefore not only an intimation of its being the will of God that Jacob should inherit the blessing, but a proof also that Esau was a profane person; for in selling his birthright, he not merely made light of the honour and pre-eminence which might attach to him, as the eldest son, in the sight of the world, but he despised all the blessings, and privileges, and honours which belonged to the first-born of the son of Abraham; and virtually declared, when he said to Jacob, "Behold, I am at the point to die, and what profit shall this birthright do to me?" that he saw nothing valuable, no, nor any thing real, in the promises which had been made to Abraham, and renewed to Isaac, and which he had no doubt been taught to regard as his own inheritance. He did, indeed, afterwards desire to have the blessing when it was irrevocably given to Jacob; for he sought carefully, and with the most passionate entreaty, to have his father's sentence reversed. This, however, was only for temporal objects; for it is plainly intimated elsewhere in Scripture, that he set at nought all that was most valuable in the covenant made with Abraham, when it is said of him by an inspired apostle that he was a profane person, who for a mess of pottage sold his birthright. All this Isaac ought to have carefully pondered; and he might have seen in it a very unequivocal confirmation of what had been intimated from the beginning, that the elder should serve the younger; and, therefore, in still adhering to his purpose of bestowing the blessing upon Esau, he did assuredly endeavour to accomplish that which God had purposed, and in various ways intimated, should not take place.

But though all this is very obvious, we are not warranted to

say that Isaac did knowingly and deliberately attempt to alter or to frustrate the purpose of God, or that he was conscious at the moment of acting in opposition to the divine will in the matter of blessing his sons. It is obvious that his fault arose from not duly weighing the divine intimations which he had received, so as to understand them, and from not looking with sufficient impartiality to the conduct of his son Esau; and it is equally evident that this was the consequence of that blind affection for his son which has so often proved the ruin of children, and brought down the grey hairs of parents with sorrow to the grave. But notwithstanding the patriarch's faults, which we have no desire either to defend or palliate, he believed not only that the promise made to Abraham, involving spiritual and eternal blessings, was faithful, and would be fulfilled in his seed, but that it would be conveyed also by his paternal benediction pronounced over his son; and though in doing so he fancied that he was blessing one son, while in reality he was bestowing his benediction on another, he did nevertheless believe with unfaltering confidence that the blessings promised were of infinite value, and that the promise would be assuredly fulfilled. Nay, the very mistake into which he fell, through the sinful weakness of parental affection, did in reality bring his faith more prominently into view,—I mean his faith both in the value of the promise, and in its being inseparably connected with his dying blessing; for what else can account for the affliction and anguish of spirit which he felt, when he discovered that he had been deceived beyond the possibility of rectifying his mistake? We are told that while "Jacob was yet scarce gone out from the presence of Isaac his father, Esau his brother came in from his hunting. And Isaac his father said unto him, Who art thou? And he said, I am thy son, thy first-born Esau. And Isaac trembled very exceedingly, and said, Who? where is he that hath taken venison, and brought it to me, and I have eaten of all before thou camest, and have blessed him? yea, and he shall be blessed." However willing he was to revoke the blessing, he was convinced that he had no power to do so; and while his weakness, therefore, is a solemn warning to every parent, that very weakness served to show the high value of the blessings which he bequeathed, and his firm conviction of the certainty with which

they would be bestowed. And that he did at last entirely acquiesce in the divine determination is evident in the charge which he gave to Jacob, when he said to him,—"Thou shalt not take a wife of the daughters of Canaan. Arise, go to Padan-aram, to the house of Bethuel thy mother's father; and take thee a wife from thence of the daughters of Laban thy mother's brother. And God Almighty bless thee, and make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, that thou mayest be a multitude of people; and give thee the blessing of Abraham, to thee, and to thy seed with thee; that thou mayest inherit the land wherein thou art a stranger, which God gave unto Abraham."

These remarks are equally applicable to the explanation of Rebekah's conduct in the transaction here recorded. She had the best ground to believe that, in the will and purpose of God, Jacob was to inherit the blessing; and in so far, therefore, as she desired to see this accomplished, she was seeking nothing but what was in accordance with the mind of God. She erred, however, or rather she sinned grievously, in having recourse to fraud and falsehood, in order to bring about an event for the due fulfilment of which she had received the pledged word of the living God; and she reaped the fruits of that fraud in the trouble in which all the parties concerned were thereby involved. It might, no doubt, appear to her impossible, with what she knew of Isaac's avowed purpose to bless Esau, that the blessing should be secured for Jacob, without some such stratagem as that which she devised and executed. But it was the presumption of unbelief on her part to suppose that the vindication of the divine faithfulness required that she should interfere, and, by art and falsehood, secure the accomplishment of a divine promise. The fact that she had no other way of helping on that accomplishment but by having recourse to a sinful expedient, was itself a proof that God did not require, any more than he needed, her co-operation; and it was her part, therefore, to have left it to divine wisdom to devise the means of fulfilling His own purpose. But, on the other hand, her sin and weakness were no reason why these purposes should not be carried into effect. The promise concerning Jacob was absolute,—it was given in the perfect foreknowledge of all that was to happen,—and it was not, therefore, to be falsified, because some of the parties concerned did,

through the misgivings of unbelief, employ unlawful means to bring it about. Rebekah's scheme, therefore, was permitted to succeed; and the plans of both were overruled to bear testimony to the sovereignty of Him who determines all things according to the counsel of His own will.

But amidst all the frailties and the sins both of Isaac and Rebekah, there was exhibited on the part of both a very striking manifestation of their confidence in the reality and value of the blessings comprehended in the promise made to Abraham, future and unseen as all these blessings were; for what else can account for their eagerness in wishing to secure these blessings respectively to their favourite child? And herein their conduct, with all its faults, may minister a severe reproof to many, who, while they profess to be Christians, pilgrims, and strangers, looking for a better country, that is, an heavenly, are nevertheless living as if there were no reality in any thing but what is seen and temporal, dealing with the objects of faith as if they were mere matters of opinion and speculation. And, on the other hand, the conduct of the eminent persons here spoken of furnishes a very solemn warning to Christians to beware how they employ means in themselves unlawful, for the purpose of accomplishing an object however great or good. If the use of such means could ever be pleaded with any show of reason, it was assuredly in the transaction recorded in this passage. Yet who can look at these means, and hesitate for a moment to pronounce them derogatory to the honour and offensive to the holiness of God,—as was manifested in the sorrow and trouble wherein all the parties concerned were involved? Nor let it be supposed that the success which may accompany such expedients, and the good that may ultimately result from them, are any proof or intimation of their being sanctioned or approved of by God. It is in the holy, wise, and powerful control which he exercises over all his creatures and all their actions that God displays the glory of his supremacy as the Sovereign Disposer of all things: for it is the high and holy prerogative of Him who is wonderful in counsel and excellent in working, to render even the selfish and sinful schemes of men subservient to the accomplishment of his own righteous purposes. "He maketh the wrath of man to praise him, and restraineth the remainder of his wrath."

XVI.

JACOB'S VISION.

GENESIS XXVIII. 10-15.

THE circumstances which occasioned Jacob's departure from his father's house are recorded in the preceding chapter. We are there told that "Esau hated Jacob, because of the blessing wherewith his father blessed him; and Esau said in his heart, The days of mourning for my father are at hand; then will I slay my brother Jacob:" that is, Esau impatiently anticipated his father's death, that he might without restraint gratify his revenge by slaying his brother. These words of Esau being told to Rebekah, "she sent and called Jacob her younger son, and said unto him, Behold, thy brother Esau, as touching thee, doth comfort himself, purposing to kill thee. Now therefore, my son, obey my voice; and arise, flee thou to Laban my brother to Haran; and tarry with him a few days, until thy brother's fury turn away." We cannot doubt that, in the severe trial to which Jacob was thus subjected, in being compelled to flee for his life, an exile from his father's house, both he and his mother Rebekah saw the chastisement of their sin,—the bitter consequence of the fraud which they had practised upon Isaac. But though Jacob's offence was thus the immediate cause of his suffering, and might be regarded perhaps by Esau as sufficient to justify him in the violent purpose which he formed against his brother's life, it is equally plain that Jacob was the object of persecution, and that in whatever way he might have obtained the blessing, his

obtaining it at all would have exposed him to Esau's hatred. It was clearly the purpose of God that Jacob should inherit the blessing promised to Abraham; and whatever excuse, therefore, Esau might think he had for seeking to take away his brother's life, he was in reality endeavouring to defeat what he might and ought to have known was a divine purpose.

It was not, however, Esau's desire to have the blessing in all its extent merely transferred from Jacob to himself. For the spiritual, and infinitely the most valuable part of that blessing he cared nothing. He had long before that time willingly and deliberately relinquished his claim to that blessing, when he despised his birthright, selling it for a mess of pottage. In other words, he had rejected the Gospel, deliberately bartering his interest in the Abrahamic Covenant, for the gratification of an appetite which, no doubt, might have been otherwise very soon satisfied. His hatred of Jacob, therefore, was not on account of his inheriting the promise, "In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed," but on account of the temporal promise which was inseparably bound up with the other, namely, "To thee, and to thy seed, will I give the land of Canaan for an everlasting inheritance." All this is implied in the declaration of an inspired apostle, who says, that "Esau was a profane person;" and it appears from the previous verses, that when he witnessed Jacob's departure, he entertained the hope of being for ever rid of his rival, and of still succeeding to all that he cared for in his father's blessing. "When Esau," we are told, "saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob, and sent him away to Padan-aram, to take him a wife from thence; and that as he blessed him he gave him a charge, saying, Thou shalt not take a wife of the daughters of Canaan; and that Jacob obeyed his father and his mother, and was gone to Padan-aram; and Esau seeing that the daughters of Canaan pleased not Isaac his father; then went Esau unto Ishmael, and took unto the wives which he had Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael, Abraham's son, the sister of Nebajoth, to be his wife." Though disappointed, then, as to the deadly purpose which he had formed against Jacob, it is obvious that he still cherished the hope of securing all that he esteemed worth having in his father's blessing; while, with respect to the promise of a Saviour, he not merely cared nothing for it, but would willingly have put

to death the individual in whose life that promise was bound up, so that it could not be fulfilled in any other. Truly he was a profane person.

It appears, then, that though Jacob's own conduct was the immediate cause of that enmity on the part of his brother, which drove him from his father's house, and subjected him to manifold privations and perils, he was in reality persecuted for the truth's sake. It was said in the beginning, in the sentence pronounced upon the serpent, "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed." This enmity very soon manifested itself in the case of Cain, "who," as the Scriptures declare, "was of that wicked one, and slew his brother, ... because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous;" and though it has never been altogether unrestrained, and has often been so checked and subdued by the overruling providence of God, as to be prevented from appearing in acts of open violence, yet it has never ceased to exist; nor has any individual believer ever been warranted to expect that he would be altogether exempted from experiencing the bitterness of that enmity. It will be found, moreover, that the most eminent of the saints of God,—those who have occupied the most prominent places in the history of the Church,—have been brought most closely into conflict with this enmity, and have suffered the most largely from its violence. The Scriptures are full of examples and illustrations of this truth; and of these examples we have one in the case of Jacob, who was compelled to leave his father's house,—to enter on a long and perilous journey,—to be for a season a destitute and houseless wanderer,—and, after encountering the manifold perils which, in that age, and in the country through which he passed, must have beset a solitary traveller, to find that he had exchanged a home, with all the comforts which a fond and indulgent mother could provide, for a state of servitude in which, though among relatives and professed friends, he was dealt with as a stranger,—"consumed by the drought in the day, and by the frost in the night, till sleep departed from his eyes." The destitute condition in which he left his father's house—the consequence, no doubt, of the haste with which it was necessary for him to escape the deadly hatred of Esau—is very emphatically set forth in the passage before us,

where he is spoken of in language which implies that he hardly knew whither he was going, and that either he was far from the habitations of men, or was compelled by a sense of danger to avoid them. "He lighted upon a certain place, and tarried there all night, because the sun was set; and he took of the stones of that place, and put them for his pillows, and lay down in that place to sleep."

How striking the contrast between his condition on that memorable night and what it had been all his life before, during which he had enjoyed, to the full, all that the son of Abraham's heir, and the favourite child of his mother, might be supposed to enjoy! But such, in one form or another, has been the discipline through which the most eminent saints have been destined to pass. The whole tenor of Scripture plainly intimates, that, by an established principle in the economy of grace, high attainments, in all that constitutes true excellence of character, can only be reached through a course of severe, and, it may be, long-continued trial. Nor would it be difficult to show, that, from the very constitution of man, as a fallen and sinful creature, it is most reasonable to suppose that such discipline should be necessary, for correcting the sinful tendencies of his nature, and for maturing all those graces and virtues which constitute holiness of character. But believers need no such arguments. It will be enough for them to know, and to remember, that such is the ordination of God, as appears both from the many express warnings addressed to them generally, to prepare them for trials, and by the manifold examples of distinguished saints, who have uniformly been distinguished also by the number, the severity, or the protracted nature, of their afflictions. These warnings and examples are so very numerous, as fairly to warrant the conclusion that, in every case, great eminence in sanctity of character has been united with great severity of trial, even though in some cases it may not be apparent to the world. And we can easily conceive how it may be so: for who does not know that there may be suffering, very severe too, and in a thousand forms,—inward spiritual conflicts, and outward worldly trials,—of which the world neither knows nor can know any thing? and that trials may be very sharp to one, which to another would appear very light? And how easy, then, is it for

Him who searches the heart, and tries the reins of the children of men, to select, in the case of every one of his people, the peculiar trial which is best fitted to accomplish his gracious purposes respecting them! and how consoling for them to know and believe that such a selection is made,—that out of the innumerable trials which might overtake them, that, and that only, which is best for them is appointed,—and that the extent to which it is to go, both in severity and duration, is determined by wisdom which cannot err, and by power which cannot be resisted! To every devout believer this consideration will afford comfort and satisfaction, which the mere removal of the trial itself never could impart. He knows that in faithfulness he has been afflicted.

To the truth of this remark we cannot doubt, I think, that Jacob would have borne a willing testimony. He was exposed, as we have already seen, to tribulation which must, to him, have been peculiarly severe, from the circumstances in which he had spent the previous years of his life, in the society of an affectionate and indulgent mother. But in all probability these very circumstances rendered such a trial necessary; and if so, the patriarch would have reason afterwards to say, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted." His affliction would, in fact, prove an inestimable blessing. But this was not the only ground on which Jacob would have reason to acknowledge the grace and the goodness of God. With the commencement of his trials, there commenced also those gracious communications from Heaven by which he was eminently honoured, and from which he must have derived enjoyment unspeakably greater than all the worldly comforts which his father's house had ever afforded, or could afford him. Even the repetition of his father's blessing, which he received on the eve of his departure, must itself have gone far towards reconciling him to the painful step which he was compelled to take, in leaving his country and his home. He had, indeed, received that blessing before. But he had obtained it by fraud,—it was extorted from his reluctant father, who would fain have recalled it; and whatever, therefore, he might have learned from his mother respecting the divine communication which she had received concerning her two sons, he might have been ready to give way, not only to the painful

reflection, that he had left on his father's mind a feeling of anger and dissatisfaction with him, as a deceitful and undutiful son, but also to some doubt or misgiving whether the blessing, obtained in such a way, and by such means, would be available to him,—or whether, by incurring his father's displeasure, he had not forfeited his interest in all that was included in the blessing. Such doubts might have arisen in his mind; and at all events, it must have been a source of great anxiety and uneasiness to him, if he had left his father in the same state of feeling towards him as was manifested when he said to Esau, his eldest son, "Who? where is he that hath taken venison, and brought it me, and I have eaten of all before thou camest, and have blessed him? yea, and he shall be blessed..... Thy brother came with subtilty, and hath taken away thy blessing..... Behold, I have made him thy lord, and all his brethren have I given to him for servants; and with corn and wine have I sustained him; and what shall I do now unto thee, my son?"

It was impossible that Jacob could have left his father in such a frame of mind towards him, especially as it was more than probable that he would never see him again, without some very painful feelings,—feelings which might have affected very deeply, not only his temporal comforts, but his hopes of the divine favour and protection. But this cause of anxiety and apprehension was removed. Isaac, it is evident, had been brought to a right mind on the subject of the blessing which he had been anxious to bestow on Esau, but had inadvertently, and against his will, pronounced on Jacob; and was satisfied that, notwithstanding the means which Jacob had employed to obtain it, it was the will and purpose of God that it should be Jacob's. All this is evident from what is stated in the preceding verses of this chapter, where we find Isaac expressing his anxiety about the connection which Jacob was to form in marriage, in such a way as implied that to Jacob alone he looked for the fulfilment of the promise made to Abraham; and where we find him, moreover, repeating the blessing to him in such a way as must have satisfied Jacob that he was reconciled to his father, and that he was right also with God. "Isaac called Jacob, and blessed him, and charged him, and said unto him, Thou shalt not take a wife of the daughters of Canaan. Arise, go to Padan-aram, to the

house of Bethuel thy mother's father; and take thee a wife from thence of the daughters of Laban thy mother's brother. And God Almighty bless thee, and make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, that thou mayest be a multitude of people; and give thee the blessing of Abraham, to thee, and to thy seed with thee; that thou mayest inherit the land wherein thou art a stranger, which God gave unto Abraham."

We can easily conceive what lightness of heart, and enlargement of spirit Jacob must have experienced from this interview with his aged, and, as he then supposed, dying father; and with what fortitude, and comparative cheerfulness he would enter on that journey which was to separate him, perhaps for ever in this world, from all who were dear to him. The trial was not removed by this change in his father's sentiments and feelings towards him. It must still be undergone. Even with his father's blessing, cordially and affectionately uttered, he could not remain but at the peril of his life. But how must that trial have been softened by the assurance that he went away accompanied by his father's prayers, and under the guidance of his father's God! and how necessary was the continuance of his trial, to keep him mindful of this gracious interposition on his behalf! It is thus that God still deals with his people. He does not always remove their trials and afflictions, when they cry to him for deliverance. But if they are anxious to reap the blessed fruit of their trials, even the growing sanctification of their nature, He will without fail do for them what is far better than merely removing the cause of their sorrow and suffering: he will make the season of affliction a season of special refreshing from his own presence,—when he will let in upon their spirits the light of heavenly hope and consolation,—when he will show, and make them understand the value of the spiritual blessings secured for them in the everlasting covenant,—and when he will impart to them a more lively apprehension of the certainty and the value of that inheritance to the hope of which they have been begotten again. So it was with Jacob when Isaac called him and blessed him, thereby removing from his mind a load of anxiety and care far more painful, and more difficult to bear, than any mere outward trial. But even this was only the beginning of a series of divine communications, whereby the patri-

arch's spirit was refreshed, and his faith strengthened, in seasons of great trouble and perplexity. And of these we have a very remarkable instance recorded in the passage before us. "He lighted," we are told, "upon a certain place, and tarried there all night, because the sun was set; and he took of the stones of that place, and put them for his pillows, and lay down in that place to sleep. And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven; and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it. And, behold, the Lord stood above it."

Jacob could not doubt that this vision was from the Lord; and though nothing had been said to him in the way of explanation, he could not have failed to see in it an intimation that the God of Abraham and of Isaac was his God,—that angels had received a charge concerning him, to guide and to protect him in all his ways,—and that destitute and solitary as his condition appeared to be, banished from the habitations of men, a friendless outcast and wanderer, laying himself down to sleep where he chanced to light upon a place, yet he was watched over and cared for, as no earthly friends could have cared for him, and guided and protected in his journey, as no human skill and strength could have guided and protected him. But he was not left merely to draw this inference from the vision which appeared to him. There was vouchsafed to him a direct and most explicit communication, assuring him of the constant presence of God wherever he went, foretelling his safe return from his temporary exile, confirming the promise which had been given to him in the blessing of Isaac his father, and solemnly making over to him and to his seed the inheritance which had been sworn to Abraham. This communication did not, any more than Isaac's second blessing, put an end to Jacob's trials; nor did it promise him safety and peace if he should then return to his father's house. The trial was still to be undergone. There was still before him a long and wearisome journey, in the course of which many things might occur to awaken his fears, and try his faith; and at the end of it there was awaiting him a servitude of twenty long years, during which he was to experience the bitterness of hope long deferred, and might be ready at times to give way to despondency or impatience. But the grace and condescension

of God were far more clearly manifested, in preparing and strengthening him for his trials, than they would have been by removing or putting an end to these trials: and however severe or protracted they might be, there was enough to silence all his murmurs, and to resolve all his doubts, and to dissipate all his fears and misgivings, in the recollection of that memorable night when he beheld, in vision, a ladder reaching from earth to heaven, whereon the angels of God ascended and descended, and when "the Lord stood above it, and said, I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed; and thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed. And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of."

Largely as this communication must have ministered to the consolation and encouragement of Jacob, the fact of its being put on record does very plainly intimate that it was not to be exclusively the property of the patriarch; for, being recorded, it forms part of that Revelation concerning which the apostle says, "Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope." The revelation made to Jacob, therefore, has been virtually made to every believer, in every subsequent age of the Church,—declaring as it were once for all, that if the unceasing watchfulness which God exercises over his people, in the way of preserving, directing, and providing for them, were made palpable to the senses, they would see and hear substantially what the patriarch saw and heard, on the occasion referred to in the passage before us: for it is recorded as a general truth, that angels are "ministering spirits, sent forth to minister to them who shall be heirs of salvation;" and every true Christian has an explicit assurance, as Jacob had, that the Lord will not leave any of his people till he has done all that he has said concerning them.

Jacob's vision, then, was just a palpable manifestation of that

divine protection and guidance which are unceasingly exercised on behalf of all who have been reconciled to God, and are numbered among his children: and be their trials what they may, they have enough in this passage to furnish consolation and comfort under them. But there is more in the passage before us, than merely a very intelligible and striking representation of the providence of God in regard to his Church. It presents us with one of the clearest and most interesting intimations of the blessed effects of Christ's mediatorial work, which are to be found in the Old Testament scriptures,—setting forth the ground on which every gracious communication had been, and was to be made from heaven, to the children of men. We are taught by our Lord himself to put this interpretation on the transaction here recorded. In the first chapter of John's Gospel, it is recorded of Nathanael, that when he came to Jesus, Jesus said of him, "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile! Nathanael saith unto him, Whence knowest thou me? Jesus answered and said unto him, Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig-tree, I saw thee. Nathanael answered and saith unto him, Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel. Jesus answered and said unto him, Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig-tree, believest thou? thou shalt see greater things than these. And he saith unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man."

It is impossible, I think, to doubt, that in these words our Lord alluded to the transaction recorded in the passage under consideration,—plainly intimating, that though Jacob's vision was intended, in the first instance, to revive the hope and strengthen the faith of the patriarch, it did, at the same time, concern the Church of God in all future ages, conveying to believers the assurance that there was a communication established between heaven and earth, whereby they might have at all times access to God, enjoy his fatherly care, and experience the constant presence of Him who neither slumbers nor sleeps; and that it was a symbolical prediction of Him, through whom this communication has been established, and in whom all the families of the earth are to be blessed.

The revelation vouchsafed to Jacob, then, though one of the most striking intimations of the effects of Christ's mediatorial work which had till then been given, was still but a shadowy representation of what was exhibited in the fulness of time, when the Word was made flesh,—when God in very deed dwelt with men on the earth,—when they beheld His glory, the glory as of the only-begotten Son of God, full of grace and truth,—and saw, in all his miracles and mighty works, the ministers, as it were, of the divine pleasure, carrying into effect the purposes of His grace and mercy. It was only in Christ's appearing, that the way by which a friendly intercourse has been opened between heaven and earth was fully revealed; and when men, therefore, witnessed the manifold intimations of the divine favour which our Lord's miracles conveyed, and saw clearly unfolded the great principle of the sinner's reconciliation to God, it was then that they saw the true import of the patriarch's vision,—the reality of what he beheld in a type. All, then, who through the knowledge and belief of the truth have been brought near to God, have realized the fulfilment of what was symbolically revealed to Jacob: and in so far as they have been delivered from the spirit of bondage, and have been made partakers of the Spirit of adoption,—in so far as they can approach God with the confidence of children, and address him as a gracious Father, to whom they have been reconciled,—to that extent they are in the actual enjoyment of that intercourse with heaven which the Son of God came to establish, and which he is now exalted to extend and to maintain.

XVII.

JACOB'S VISION.

GENESIS XXVIII. 16, 17.

It has been supposed by some, that a very momentous change took place in the spiritual condition and character of Jacob on the occasion here referred to,—that, in fact, it was the period of his conversion to God, when the saving knowledge of the truth was first imparted to him, and when he became a true believer. I do not know that we are warranted to go this length; indeed, I am inclined to believe that, long before this time, Jacob knew and feared the God of Abraham. But we may infer, I think, from his own language, as here recorded, that he received on that memorable night such views of the character and perfections of God, and such impressions of the divine presence, as exercised a very powerful influence on his future character and conduct. It is evident that he then felt, as he had never before felt, his nearness to God; and that he was then impressed, as he had never before been, with a sense of his obligation to the protecting providence and to the sovereign grace of the God of his fathers. He "awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not." The expression, "I knew it not," plainly intimates, I think, an acknowledgment on the part of Jacob, that in laying himself down to sleep with a stone for his pillow, far from the comforts which he had enjoyed in his father's house, and apparently deserted of all, he had not realized, as it was alike his duty and his privilege to do, the presence and the pro-

tection of Him who neither slumbers nor sleeps. His was a condition especially calculated to lead his thoughts to God,—to remind him of all that he had heard, and from his infancy must have been familiar with, respecting the divine dispensations towards Abraham and Isaac,—and to render very precious to him the assurance which had been given to Abraham, and in which his posterity were interested, "Fear not, Abraham, I am thy shield, and thine exceeding great reward." The more destitute and helpless that he found his condition to be, the more earnestly should he have looked to God for protection and deliverance; and had he been as feelingly alive to his dependence on God as his fathers had been, and as ready to recognise the hand of God in all events, he would have felt, on laying him down to sleep, that his only consolation in his state of privation and solitude was the conviction that God was near him; and he might have fallen asleep with the gracious assurance in his heart, and with the confident expression on his lips,—I know that the Lord is in this place.

We are not warranted to say that there was no such sentiment at all in the mind of Jacob, or that the new and trying circumstances in which he was placed had no effect in leading him to think of God, and of supplicating his protection, in the absence of all those comforts to which, from his infancy, he had been accustomed, under the watchful eye of an affectionate and indulgent mother, and when exposed to dangers it might be more imminent and numerous than he could well conjecture; but his own language implies that his apprehension of the divine presence was not so vivid, nor his dependence on the divine protection so exclusive, as it ought to have been. He had already showed, by his manner of obtaining his father's blessing, that, under the training of his mother, he had been led to rely on human wisdom and skill for that which he ought to have looked for from the gracious interposition of God himself; and though he might not, therefore, be altogether forgetful of his dependence on the divine protection, nor resign himself to sleep in his then destitute and solitary condition without committing himself to that protection, yet he might have been relying more on his own strength, and might have had his mind more occupied with schemes of his own devising, than was befitting him in circum-

stances where his dependence on God was so palpable. He had, indeed, departed with his father's blessing; which, if he understood and believed it, was sufficient of itself to awaken and keep alive in his mind an abiding sense of the divine presence, as his only security amidst the manifold perils to which he might be exposed: still it would appear that his apprehension of that presence had not been so vivid as it ought to have been, and that he felt rebuked and humbled by the gracious communication which was vouchsafed to him, constraining him to exclaim, "Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not."

We can easily suppose, that the effect of this remarkable transaction was to awaken, and keep alive in the mind of Jacob, a deeper, as well as a more constant sense of the divine presence than he had ever before cherished; and that, in all his subsequent trials, and in every season of danger, he found refuge and rest in the thought, "The Lord is in this place." And such is the practical lesson which that transaction is still fitted to inculcate. Nor are even the holiest and most devout beyond the need of having this lesson frequently brought before them: for though it expresses one of the simplest and most elementary of truths,—namely, the omnipresence of God,—yet it is a truth which to all practical purposes is frequently overlooked or forgotten. None who are in the slightest degree acquainted with the Scriptures, and whose notions of the Divine Being and perfections are derived from what is there revealed, can for a moment doubt that God filleth heaven and earth with his presence; and none, therefore, would, at any time, or in any circumstances, hesitate to say, if the question were proposed to them, "Surely the Lord is in this place." All will admit the truth, however little they may have felt the solemnity and grandeur of the Psalmist's language, "Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee."

Yet, while all this is readily admitted, and, in fact, cannot be denied by any who acknowledge the existence of a God infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in all his perfections, how frequently is it so forgotten or disregarded, as to be practically void of all salutary influence on the heart and life! It is but too plain that there are multitudes among those who have heard, and never thought of disputing this truth, on whom it scarcely ever operates in the way even of restraint: for if it did, could they sit down to contrive, and deliberately proceed to carry into effect, schemes of ungodliness, whether of pleasure or of gain, satisfied if they can only conceal from the world what, in their motives or their conduct, would bring upon them the world's censure, though they neither do nor can deny that they are in the presence, and under the immediate inspection of Him who searches the heart, and tries the reins of the children of men?

But even with regard to those who not only admit this truth, but have sometimes felt it to be one of great practical power and influence, in the way both of correction and encouragement, they will be ready to acknowledge that it has but too frequently ceased to exercise this influence; and that, amidst the cares and pursuits of this world, they have been prone at all times to forget, or have failed to recognise, the presence of God, even in those circumstances in which they ought especially to have remembered him. How often, in the successful issue of their schemes for the increase or the continuance of their worldly comforts, have they regarded that success too much as a matter of course, as the result that could hardly fail to follow from the skill and diligence with which they had formed and prosecuted their plans,—while they did not distinctly recognise and acknowledge the interposition of Him who openeth his hand, and supplieth the wants of every living thing! In their eagerness to avoid or ward off some event that threatened to mar or diminish their worldly enjoyments, how often have they been mainly relying on their own skill and strength, or on the aid of their fellow-men, with but a very faint impression of their dependence on the all-wise and all-powerful providence of God! And in how many seasons of danger have they experienced the divine presence and protection, without feeling or expressing any corresponding sense of obligation and gratitude! In cases,

indeed, of palpable and imminent peril, when a sense both of their danger and of their helplessness is forced upon them, they will of course turn their thoughts to God, and seek at his hand that protection or deliverance which no created power can afford them; and when that deliverance comes, I doubt not they will offer the tribute of their thanksgiving and praise. But how frequently, in the ordinary intercourse of life, are they exposed to danger of which they were never conscious, merely because they are only in circumstances through which multitudes are every day passing in safety, and because they reckon on the same result in their own case as they are constantly witnessing in that of others! Yet, on reflection, they must be convinced that they have often been thus placed in perilous circumstances, while they did not recognise or reverently acknowledge the presence of God; and often, therefore, have they had reason to say with Jacob, in the spirit of humble confession, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not."

But the transaction here recorded was a memorable one to Jacob, not merely as unfolding to him clearer and more enlarged views of the providence of God, and giving him a pledge of the divine presence and protection in all future seasons of difficulty and danger, but also, and especially, as a revelation of the grace of God,—such a revelation as he could neither have expected nor conceived of. The vision which was vouchsafed to him was a large addition to a previous revelation of Gospel truth; and it presented, in a light clearer and more striking than had yet been shed upon it, the glorious effects of Christ's mediatorial work, in opening up a communication between heaven and earth, whereby men may have access to God, and be admitted to hold fellowship with him here,—that being itself but a foretaste of their admission into his immediate presence hereafter.

This revelation, of course, was designed for the consolation and encouragement of the Church in all subsequent times; and on this ground it has been recorded: but that Jacob should have been honoured to receive this remarkable communication,—whereby he was placed on the same level, as it were, with Isaac and Abraham, and all the distinguished saints who had gone before him,—was fitted to awaken feelings both of the deepest humility, and the warmest admiration. It was a very plain

and a peculiarly impressive pledge of his interest in the covenant made with Abraham,—an assurance that all the events of his future history were to be inseparably connected with the interests of the Church, and the manifestation of the glory of the God of Abraham, as the only living and true God. And while he was thus honoured to be the depositary, as Abraham and Isaac had been before him, of that precious promise in which all the families of the earth were interested, he was himself admitted to very near and intimate converse with God. While, in the vision of angels ascending and descending between heaven and earth, he beheld a pledge of the unceasing care which was to be exercised in all future times over the Church and people of God, he received an express assurance of his own personal interest in that care; and while the spot on which he lay was promised to him and to his seed after him for an inheritance, he saw from the same spot that better country, even an heavenly, of which Canaan was but the type, and in the hope of which he afterwards lived and died. This was a communication for which he had no warrant to look; and which, therefore, he had no ground to reckon on: and when he thought, on the one hand, of his own unworthiness and sin, and contemplated, on the other, the magnitude of the blessings which were conferred on himself and his seed after him, as well as the manner in which the communication was made, he might well stand amazed at the divine condescension, and might exclaim in admiration of such an unexpected proof of the grace and the goodness of God,—"Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not."

But how much more astonished must he have been, if he was conscious that, in his desolate and solitary condition, he had been casting about for some way of deliverance and relief, and calculating the probabilities of his escape from the dangers of his long and untried journey, and of his success at the termination thereof, rather than committing himself to the care and keeping of the God of his fathers, in the faith of the blessing which Isaac had pronounced upon him! There is reason, I think, to believe, as I have already shown, that such was in reality his condition; and that the revelation which was vouchsafed to him, though full of grace and mercy, carried with it a

sharp rebuke, — sharp in proportion to his consciousness of having expected less than it was his duty and privilege to expect, as the heir of the promise made to Abraham, renewed to Isaac, and entailed upon himself. In any circumstances, even though he had been in the most devout frame of mind, such a revelation as he was honoured with must have awakened feelings of the deepest humility and self-abasement; for even in such a state of mind and feeling, and though far less chargeable than he had been with unbelief and disobedience, what could have entitled him to be brought into the society of angels,—to be placed, as it were, on the very threshold of the dwelling-place of the Lord of glory,—to be permitted to "see the King in his beauty, and to behold the land that is very far off"? But if he was conscious that he had but very faintly been recognising God, even in his overruling providence, and that he had laid him down without any very vivid apprehension of the presence and protection of Him to whose favour and blessing his father had committed him, how overwhelmed must he have been with a manifestation of the divine favour which, at any time, and in any circumstances, did so unspeakably transcend any thing that he had reason to look for! and how truly might he exclaim with fear and trembling, as well as with admiration and gratitude, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not!"

And it was with fear and trembling that Jacob so expressed himself; for we read in the next verse, that "he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." To one class of persons the fear which Jacob felt and expressed might appear to be very natural,—I mean those who are utter strangers to any thing like communion with God, and who, moreover, have no desire, and no capacity for enjoying any such communion. They are conscious that any thing which would impress them with a vivid sense of God's presence, any thing that would force upon them the reality of the unseen world,—whether heaven or hell,—would awaken in their mind such an idea of danger, though it might be a dark and ill-defined idea, as nothing could remove till they made their escape from the cause of their uneasiness. Such are the fears and terrors of a superstitious and unsanctified heart. This, how-

ever, was not the ground of Jacob's fear. The design of the revelation which was vouchsafed to him, was not to terrify him by a display of the divine majesty and glory, or to intimate to him the coming judgment of God on account of his transgressions; but to comfort him in his affliction,—to impart to him the peace, and everlasting consolation, and good hope, which flow from a sense of the divine forgiveness,—to give him a pledge of the constant presence of God with him in all his subsequent difficulties and dangers,—and to communicate to him, for the consolation of himself, and of the Church after him, the blessed effects of the mediatorial work of Him in whom all the families of the earth were to be blessed.

But if such was the design and obvious tendency of the vision which Jacob saw, why, it may perhaps be asked by others, why was he "afraid," and why did he call the place "dreadful," where he had been favoured with such a manifestation of the grace and goodness of God as had seldom, perhaps never, been vouchsafed to any of the children of men? The question is easily answered. The feelings with which it is befitting sinful creatures to approach God, even to acknowledge his grace and mercy, are feelings of reverence, humility, and self-abasement; and the more largely that they have participated in the gifts of God's bounty, and in the still richer blessings of his grace, the more deeply will they be impressed with sentiments of admiration and holy awe. The same divine teaching which conveys to believers some right apprehensions of the character and perfections of God, as the just God and yet the Saviour,—the Lord God, merciful and gracious, forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin, yet by no means clearing the guilty,—does also open up to them a deeper insight into the evil and deformity of sin as it appears in the sight of Him who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity. The Lord is great, and "greatly to be feared;..... and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him." And, accordingly, angels themselves, who never sinned, are represented as covering their faces with their wings in the presence of God, while they cry one to another, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory."

And if so, then "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God?" This must be the question

which every man, who entertains any right conception of the divine character, will put to himself, as often as he presents himself before God, and ventures to address the High and Holy One of Israel. And this sentiment will be most deeply felt by those who have been most clearly taught of God, and who have been admitted to the enjoyment of the most intimate fellowship with him. One proof and illustration of this remark we have in the case of Jacob, as recorded in this passage,—and it is in accordance with many others to be found in the Bible. The sentiment of the patriarch is in substance the same with that of Job, when he was admitted to immediate communion with God, and when he exclaimed, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee: wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." When Isaiah saw in vision "the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up," and his train filling the temple, then he said, "Woe is me! for I am undone: because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!" So it was with Daniel, when there appeared to him a great vision, even the Son of God himself: for, notwithstanding the marvellous manifestation of the divine favour which he had already received, wherein he was assured that he was "greatly beloved" of the Lord, we find him saying,—"I was left alone, and saw this great vision, and there remained no strength in me; for my comeliness was turned in me into corruption, and I retained no strength..... And, behold, an hand touched me;..... and he said unto me, O Daniel, a man greatly beloved, understand the words that I speak unto thee, and stand upright; for unto thee am I now sent. And when he had spoken this word unto me, I stood trembling." And so in like manner was it with Simon Peter, when, under a lively conviction of the divinity of Christ, on witnessing a miracle which he had wrought, "he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord."

But the fear and dread which these and many other servants of God felt under a lively sense of the divine presence, were altogether different from the terror with which ungodly men would be overwhelmed, if they were compelled to realize their nearness to God. The sentiment expressed by these eminent

saints, was not the dread of wrath,—the slavish terror of the coming judgment of a Being whom they could not love, but from whose power they could not escape. It was the holy awe of the majesty and glory of God, which right views of his character will always awaken, even in the purest and most exalted of his intelligent creatures, combined with a deep feeling of their unworthiness to be admitted to such near and intimate fellowship with the Most High God: and the more that they knew and apprehended of the divine perfections, the deeper would be their reverence and their dread. Unexpected, therefore, as was the revelation which was vouchsafed to Jacob, and amazed as he was at such an act of divine condescension, there was nothing inconsistent with filial confidence and love towards God in the sentiments which he expressed, when he said,—"How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."

Though the condition and circumstances of Jacob were peculiar, when he received the communication recorded in the preceding verses, and though the communication itself, as well as the manner in which it was made, was also very remarkable and impressive, yet it will be found that his experience does not differ so very widely from that of believers in subsequent times, as might at first sight be supposed. Many, like him, have had reason to acknowledge that they found God as a gracious and merciful God, where they little thought of finding him; for many can trace their first serious impressions of divine truth, the first dawn of heavenly light upon their souls, to times and circumstances in which they either did not care for or did not expect any such manifestation of the divine favour. Some can recollect that the Word of God reached them with power, and awakened convictions both of guilt and danger which they could not suppress, at a time when they were careless and unconcerned, and were thinking little of any serious inquiry as to their hopes and prospects for eternity. An unexpected dispensation of providence, perhaps, forced upon them the question whether they were prepared to die; and the subject being thus brought irresistibly home to them, they might not be able to dismiss it until they sought and found a solution of all their doubts, and a reply to all their anxious inquiries, in the faith and hope of the Gospel.

Others may perhaps remember that, after a long season of darkness and fear, during which they had been seeking rest but finding none, light did unexpectedly break in upon their souls on reading or hearing truths with which they had long been familiar, but which then only came to them in demonstration of the Spirit and with power. And wherever such enlargement and relief have been experienced,—whether in the privacy of their retirement, or in holding converse with others on spiritual and divine things, or in waiting on the services of God's house in the assembly of the saints,—have they not reason to say, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not"? And though such communications of light and life cannot fail to impart peace and joy, yet they will awaken also feelings of solemn awe and reverence, such as they never felt before, for the majesty and holiness of God. So far from there being any inconsistency between such feelings of godly fear, and the enjoyment of peace and confidence towards God, these feelings will be deepened in proportion as their views of the divine perfections on the one hand, and of their own sinfulness on the other, become clearer and more enlarged. It is impossible for believers to reflect on the riches of that grace whereby they have been brought from darkness and death, into the glorious light and liberty of the sons of God, without feelings of the deepest humility, as well as the warmest admiration and gratitude; and when at any time they are admitted to hold fellowship with God, and to feel that they are near him,—encouraged to pour out their hearts before him, and enabled to commit all that concerns them into his hand, with the assurance that he hears, and will undertake for them,—the enjoyment of such a privilege must fill them with astonishment, and must awaken the holy fear of forfeiting it,—not the slavish dread which the apprehension of wrath awakens, but the child-like fear of offending the gracious Father who has forgiven their innumerable and aggravated transgressions, healed their backslidings, and loved them freely. There is no bondage in such fear as this. It is that humble and lowly frame of spirit which never fails to be generated by the faith of the Gospel, and in the exercise of which will be found to consist not a little of the peace and blessedness of the divine life. The nearer, therefore, that believers are admitted to God,—the more vividly that they can realize his

presence as the God of all grace, and mercy, and consolation,—the more largely that they receive communications of his favour, by the enlightening and comforting influences of his Spirit,—and the more boldly that they can come to his throne of grace, to obtain mercy, and to find grace to help them in the time of need,—so much the deeper will be their feelings of admiration and reverence; and whatever be the circumstances in which they enjoy such manifestations of the marvellous grace and condescension of God,—whether in their seasons of private and family devotion, or while waiting on God in the ordinances of the sanctuary,—they will feel that the sentiment which it becomes them to cherish is that of the patriarch, "How dreadful is this place! This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."

XVIII.

JACOB WRESTLING WITH THE ANGEL.

GENESIS XXXII. 24–32.

JACOB, at the time here referred to, was on his return from Padan-aram, whither he had been compelled to flee from the face of his brother Esau. It will be recollected, that on leaving his father's house, he had the satisfaction of knowing that the blessing which he had, in the first instance, secured by subtilty, was cordially bestowed upon him on the part of Isaac; and that he had not proceeded above one day's journey, as the history seems plainly to intimate, when he was favoured with a revelation of the divine grace and condescension, which, in some respects, was the most remarkable, perhaps, that had ever been vouchsafed to any of the children of men. Besides a great deal which was deeply interesting to the Church in all subsequent times, that communication contained, in respect to himself personally, the assurance that the Lord would be with him, and would keep him in all places whither he went, and would bring him again into the land of Canaan.

On the strength of this promise he resumed his journey, having first bound himself by a solemn vow to be the Lord's: and he soon experienced the divine faithfulness, in such a way as could not fail to convince him that the Lord was indeed with him whither he went. Though a solitary pilgrim, having passed Jordan, as we find him afterwards saying, with his staff only, he reached in safety the land towards which he was travelling, not-

withstanding the hardships and the perils which he must have encountered; and, under the guidance of Providence, he was directed to the house of his relative, Laban, where he was kindly received, and hospitably entertained. Subsequently, indeed, he experienced very different treatment at the hand of his kinsman, whose great concern, evidently, was to make the most of Jacob's services for the advancement of his own worldly interest. He was constrained, indeed, to acknowledge that the Lord had blessed him for Jacob's sake; and urged this consideration as the ground of his unwillingness to comply with Jacob's request to be permitted to return to his place and his country—at the same time leaving it to Jacob himself to say what his wages should be. But with all this he became envious and discontented, when, by the blessing of God, Jacob's wealth increased: and the extent to which, for the gratification of his avarice, he had for many years imbittered the life of one who was his near kinsman, and his son-in-law—one, moreover, whom he professed to regard as enjoying the special protection and blessing of God,—is evident from the enumeration of wrongs with which Jacob charged him to his face: "This twenty years have I been with thee; thy ewes and thy she-goats have not cast their young, and the rams of thy flock have I not eaten. That which was torn of beasts I brought not unto thee: I bare the loss of it: of my hand didst thou require it, whether stolen by day, or stolen by night. Thus I was: in the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night; and my sleep departed from mine eyes. Thus have I been twenty years in thy house: I served thee fourteen years for thy two daughters, and six years for thy cattle: and thou hast changed my wages ten times. Except the God of my father, the God of Abraham, and the Fear of Isaac, had been with me, surely thou hadst sent me away now empty. God hath seen mine affliction, and the labour of my hands, and rebuked thee yesternight."

The oppression which Jacob thus endured at the hand of Laban was altogether unmerited, in so far as Laban was concerned; for, in reply to the charge which Jacob thus brought against him, he did not venture to deny any part of it, but immediately proposed that they should enter into covenant, mutually engaging that in all time coming they would not, directly

or indirectly, seek each other's hurt. The privations, therefore, and the anxiety, and the fears, under which Jacob laboured, during his sojourn in Padan-aram, were the discipline which God saw to be necessary for him, both in the way of correction, and for the purpose of preparing him for the trials which he was yet to undergo,—or rather, I should say, preparing him for occupying the prominent place which he was destined by the grace of God to occupy, in advancing the divine glory in his own day, and in ministering encouragement to the Church in all subsequent times. But with all this, we cannot overlook the fact, that, in the relations which he formed in Laban's house, he was himself the immediate author of many perplexities, vexations, and trials; which must have greatly aggravated the affliction which he had suffered from the avarice of Laban. In forming these relations, he might not, indeed, be violating the letter of any express divine commandment; for no written law had yet been communicated, like that which, at a future period, was delivered to Jacob's children, from Mount Sinai. In the absence of a precise, and permanently-recorded law, which God did not vouchsafe for many ages, the great principles of his moral government were asserted and vindicated by his visiting transgression with an immediate expression of his displeasure; that is, by leaving transgressors to experience the consequences of their delinquencies, in such a way as very plainly to intimate that they had sinned. This consideration it is of great importance to keep in view, in perusing the early history of the Church,—as serving at once to vindicate the divine rectitude from the appearance of having sanctioned what was in itself sinful, and as accounting, at the same time, for the more frequent occurrence of examples of retributive judgment than it was necessary should take place in later times, after a clear and explicit revelation of the divine will had been given, and put upon permanent record. And of this principle the history of Jacob furnishes many instructive illustrations. The fraud which he practised upon his father Isaac, and which various circumstances served greatly to aggravate, was productive of much immediate trouble and sorrow; and it was to fraud and deception, on the part of his friends and family, that almost all the tribulations of his future life might be traced, down to the period at

which he left Canaan, and went to end his days in the land of Egypt.

But while Jacob was thus taught, in a way most solemn and impressive to himself, and most instructive to the Church after him, what he ought to have learned from the law written on his heart, and interpreted by very plain intimations which God had already vouchsafed, he was at the same time very graciously dealt with: and while, on reviewing his life, he was constrained to acknowledge in humility and self-abasement, that he was not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which God had showed unto him; he had also abundant reason to bless and magnify the Lord, for the grace and the goodness which had been made to pass before him. During the twenty years which he spent in exile from his father's house, he experienced manifold and continued proofs of his being under the immediate protection and guidance of the God of his fathers. It was by the direction of providence, similar to that which had been vouchsafed to the servant of Abraham of old, that he was brought to the house of his kinsman, Laban. He could not but know that on his account, or, as Laban expressed it, for his sake, God blessed and prospered whatever of Laban's was committed to his charge. It was by the immediate interposition of divine power that his own wealth increased, so that Laban's sons exclaimed, in the bitterness of their envy, "Jacob hath taken away all that was our father's; and of that which was our father's hath he gotten all this glory." And when Laban, on learning that Jacob had stolen away and fled, pursued after him seven days' journey, obviously with intentions of an hostile nature, it was by a direct communication from God that he was restrained from executing his design of violence; for we are told that "God came to Laban the Syrian in a dream by night, and said unto him, Take heed that thou speak not to Jacob either good or bad." And, besides all these proofs of God's gracious presence and protection in the midst of his afflictions and trials, it was under the sanction of divine authority, and, in fact, in obedience to a divine command, that he left Padan-aram, and set out on his return to his father's house; for the Angel of God spake unto him in a dream, saying, "I am the God of Bethel, where thou anointedst the pillar, and where thou vowedst a vow unto

me: now arise, get thee out from this land, and return unto the land of thy kindred." Accordingly, he "rose up, and set his sons and his wives upon camels; and he carried away all his cattle, and all his goods which he had gotten, the cattle of his getting, which he had gotten in Padan-aram, for to go to Isaac his father in the land of Canaan."

After being delivered, as we have already seen, from the hand of Laban, who overtook him in the mountains of Gilead, he proceeded on his journey, encouraged by this new manifestation of the divine favour, and approached the river Jordan, which he had passed twenty years before, a destitute and weary exile, but now in possession of great wealth, as wealth in those days was estimated. And on drawing near to the confines of Canaan, a remarkable proof was given him of the faithfulness of the divine promise: "And Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him. And when Jacob saw them, he said, This is God's host; and he called the name of that place Mahanaim,"—that is to say, "two hosts." This was a renewal of the vision which had been vouchsafed to him, when, on leaving his father's house, there appeared to him, while he lay on the naked earth, with a stone for his pillow, a ladder reaching from earth to heaven, and the angels of God ascending and descending on it. It was as if appealing to him whether he had not found the divine promise to be faithful and true. He left Canaan under the guardianship of these heavenly ministers of the divine pleasure, and under the same guidance he now approached the confines of the same land; and he might conclude, therefore, that nothing now awaited him but to proceed with joy and gladness to his father's dwelling, and there to rehearse the wonderful works of Him who had been with him whither he went, who had given him bread to eat, and raiment to put on, and had brought him back to his father's house in peace.

But it seemed meet to God still further to try the faith of Jacob before he was permitted to see his father's face, and take up his permanent abode in Canaan. So it was that God had dealt with Abraham, when, after triumphing over many difficulties and discouragements, and while contemplating with holy satisfaction the fulfilment of the divine promise in the person of Isaac, he was suddenly summoned to meet the severest of all his

trials, in being required to offer up Isaac for a burnt-offering unto the Lord. Jacob's trial was of a different kind,—but it furnished an equally plain intimation that he was not to look forward to the permanent and undisturbed enjoyment of the worldly wealth and comforts which the divine bounty had bestowed, as if his warfare had been at an end. He was taught, and by him the people of God in all subsequent times have been warned, that the conflict in which they are engaged must be maintained to the last,—that it is a war in which there is no discharge but death. Though Jacob, as we have seen, was favoured with a visible intimation of the divine protection, in the appearance of the angels that met him at Mahanaim, there still lay upon his spirit a depressing dread of his brother Esau; and when the messengers, whom he had sent to propitiate his favour, returned with the intelligence that Esau was approaching with four hundred men, "Jacob," we are told, "was greatly afraid and distressed,"—and proceeded to dispose of his people and his flocks, as if he could reckon on nothing but violence at the hand of Esau. Whether he did not, on this occasion, give way to fear, if not distrust, unbecoming one who had received so many and such recent assurances of the divine protection, and whether it was not partly on this account that he was still more severely tried, I cannot venture to determine. But the earnestness with which he besought the Lord to deliver him,—pleading that it was in obedience to the divine command, and on the strength of a divine promise to deal well with him, that he had returned to his country and his kindred,—showed how deeply overwhelmed he was with the fear that Esau, as he himself expressed it, would "come and smite him, and the mother with the children." While he thus prayed, he was careful also to adopt means for propitiating the favour, and, if these failed, to take measures for escaping as far as possible the hostilities, of his brother; and having taken his wives, and his servants, and his eleven sons, and all that he had, and sent them over the ford of the river Jabbok, he remained alone for the night. And then it was that the marvellous transaction took place which is related in the verses under consideration: "And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day."

Whether Jacob was aware, from the first, of what he discovered at least before this wonderful conflict was over, that the man who wrestled with him was a Divine Person, the narrative does not inform us. But he must, from the first, have been convinced that the mysterious person met him as an adversary, with the apparent purpose of disputing and resisting his entrance into Canaan; and he must have felt that, while his wives and children were exposed to the fury of Esau, his own life was in immediate jeopardy, and that on the issue of that conflict might be suspended the fulfilment of all the divine promises concerning himself and his seed. But when he discovered that it was a Divine Person who thus opposed his progress,—that it was the Angel of the Covenant himself who appeared as his enemy, and entered into actual conflict with him,—it was indeed a marvellous exercise of faith, that, instead of relinquishing the conflict, as equally hopeless and presumptuous, he should have maintained it, believing that, however mysterious this opposition might appear, the promises of God, on the strength of which he had already endured so much hardship, and encountered so many perils, could never fail of being accomplished. Indeed, it was not a new thing in the experience of the saints, that the dealings of God with them did at times appear to be inconsistent with his most explicit, and frequently-repeated promises. Abraham had long been so tried, and especially in his old age, when all his trials appeared to be at an end; for the command to offer his son Isaac did, to all appearance, render the fulfilment of God's promises impossible. But there was something more mysterious still in the transaction before us, when the Angel of the Covenant, the Eternal Word himself, appeared to Jacob as an adversary: and, therefore, never perhaps was faith more severely tried than Jacob's was during that amazing conflict. But, on the other hand, never was the triumph of faith more strikingly displayed. The Angel is spoken of as if he could not prevail against Jacob, even though he touched the hollow of his thigh, so that his thigh was out of joint as he wrestled; nay, he is represented as proposing to relinquish the conflict, saying,—"Let me go, for the day breaketh:" while Jacob, gathering strength and boldness from the very contest, as if he had already prevailed, replied,—"I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." In this also he

prevailed. The Angel "said unto him, What is thy name? And he said, Jacob. And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel,"—that is, "a prince of God,"—"for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed. And Jacob asked him, and said, Tell me, I pray thee, thy name. And he said, Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name? And he blessed him there." There was a limit beyond which the revelation vouchsafed to Jacob was not to go; and when, therefore, he ventured to ask, What is thy name?—a question which it did not concern his duty or his well-being to have answered,—he was reproved, as Manoah was at a future period, when the angel said to him,—"Why askest thou thus after my name, seeing it is secret?" But the blessing was granted, which was all that Jacob needed; while the refusal to tell him the name of this mysterious person would go to deepen those feelings of reverence and holy awe which it became him to cherish, after such a marvellous display of the divine condescension. And such was, no doubt, the effect; for Jacob, evidently with feelings of profound admiration, "called the name of the place Peniel,"—that is, "the face of God,"—"for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved."

I need hardly remark, that there is something very mysterious in the whole of the transaction here recorded; and that, in as far as concerns the nature of the bodily conflict which Jacob maintained with the Man who wrestled with him until the breaking of the day, it becomes us not to speculate, or to attempt being wise above what is written. But the transaction does, nevertheless, furnish very intelligible illustrations of very precious truths, and is therefore full of most important instruction. We must always bear in mind, what I have already hinted at, that in the early ages of the Church, while as yet there was no written record of the divine will, as regarded either the faith or the practice of men, that will was explained and inculcated by objects and events which were palpable to the senses. It was thus that the obligations of the moral law were enforced upon men, even on believers themselves, when the violations of that law were immediately followed by painful and perplexing consequences, from which they could not fail to be convinced that they had sinned, and that their sin had found them out. And it was

thus that the truths which it most nearly concerned them to know and believe, for their comfort here and their salvation hereafter, were in like manner illustrated. The doctrine of God's special providence watching over every individual of his people, however forlorn and destitute their condition may appear, was made known by the vision of angels which once and again appeared unto Jacob himself. In like manner the care of Christ over his Church, his constant presence with them during their pilgrimage here, and the certainty of that inheritance to which he will bring them hereafter, are all set forth in a very striking light, in the pillar of cloud by day, and in the pillar of fire by night, which conducted Israel through the wilderness to the land of Canaan. And many other examples, as every one must know, might be produced, of great spiritual truths illustrated and enforced by objects and events palpable to the senses. And so it is in the case before us. It is a great and a precious truth, that whatever be the trials and temptations to which the people of God are here exposed, or whatever be the immediate cause of these trials, they are all appointed of God; and that it is God, therefore, who tries, or, in one sense, is contending with them. But it is a part of the same gracious truth, that while God thus leads or brings his people into trial, he himself furnishes the resolution and the strength whereby they are enabled to sustain it; so that if he does lead, or permit them to be brought into temptation, he at least delivers them from the evil,—and not merely delivers them, but renders the temptation subservient to their spiritual improvement, making it the means of raising them to a higher place than they would otherwise have occupied in the divine life. Would Abraham, for example, have been the distinguished person that he was and is among the saints of God, if he had never been called upon to offer up his son Isaac a burnt-offering to the Lord? When believers, then, are brought into difficulties, and pressed with sore trials, they are taught to consider these trials as appointed of God,—as a proof that he has a controversy with them, partly, it may be, indeed always must be, for chastisement, but partly also for the exercise of their faith, and for strengthening their confidence in the wisdom and goodness of all his dispensations. But when was this truth more clearly illustrated, or in what way could it have been more for-

cibly inculcated, than in the case of Jacob, as related in the passage under consideration? God himself appeared in human form, to wrestle or join in conflict with the patriarch; and, in his amazing condescension, permitted Jacob to prevail. But how could Jacob have, for one moment, maintained such a conflict, if he had not received communications of grace and strength from the very person with whom he wrestled? The same truth is everywhere taught in Scripture. But what words could teach this truth so solemnly and so emphatically as it was taught by Jacob's wrestling? In that conflict God himself seemed to be against him. But though Jacob knew this, he had grace given him to hold fast, and to plead God's own promises, in opposition to the present appearance of God's displeasure; and he prevailed. And that it was by thus cleaving unto and pleading the divine promises,—that it was, in fact, by earnest and persevering prayer,—that Jacob prevailed, is evident, not only from the preceding part of this chapter, where we find him urging them with great earnestness,—as it were, putting God in remembrance, as it is elsewhere expressed in Scripture, both of His command and His promise, and thereon founding a plea for a divine interposition on his behalf,—but also from the commentary on the passage before us furnished by the Prophet Hosea, who plainly intimates that it was by such a plea that Jacob had strength and prevailed with the Angel. "By his strength," says the prophet, speaking of Jacob, "he had power with God: yea, he had power over the Angel and prevailed: he wept, and made supplication unto him: he found him in Bethel, and there he spake with us; even the Lord God of hosts: the Lord is his memorial."

XIX.

JACOB GOES DOWN TO EGYPT.

GENESIS XLVI. 1-4.

THE period referred to in the passage we are now about to consider was a very remarkable one in the history of the Church, as well as in the personal history of the patriarch. The circumstances which led Jacob to undertake this journey from Canaan to Egypt, must be familiar to every one. A sore famine, we are told, prevailed in Canaan, as well as in all other countries; and Jacob's means of subsistence being exhausted, "he said unto his sons, Why do ye look one upon another?..... Behold, I have heard that there is corn in Egypt: get you down thither, and buy for us from thence; that we may live, and not die." His ten sons arose accordingly, and went down to Egypt; whence they returned laden, indeed, with food, as much as they could carry,—their money, moreover, which they had paid for it, being secretly restored to them,—but, at the same time, bringing to their father the painful and perplexing intelligence that "the man who was the lord of the land," as they called Joseph, "spake roughly" to them, and took them for spies of the country, come to see the nakedness of the land; that he had detained one of their number, Simeon, as a hostage or pledge for their fulfilment of the only condition on which he would again see their face,—namely, that they should bring down their youngest brother, Benjamin; and that, unless Jacob should agree to this condition, it were vain for them to think of again going

down to Egypt to buy food. To this Jacob replied,—"Me have ye bereaved of my children: Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away. All these things are against me." And when Reuben remonstrated with his father, saying,—"Slay my two sons, if I bring him not to thee: deliver him into my hand, and I will bring him to thee again,"—Jacob replied, in language which intimated that, at that moment, he felt as if it were impossible that he could ever give his consent to such a proposal,—"My son shall not go down with you; for his brother is dead, and he is left alone: if mischief befall him by the way in the which ye go, then shall ye bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to the grave." But the famine continued to be sore in the land. The corn which Jacob's sons had brought out of Egypt was exhausted; and he was constrained to say to them, "Go again, buy us a little food." He was met, of course, with the objection which he might have anticipated, but which he would very willingly have evaded. "Judah spake unto him, saying, The man did solemnly protest unto us, saying, Ye shall not see my face, except your brother be with you. If thou wilt send our brother with us, we will go down and buy thee food; but if thou wilt not send him, we will not go down: for the man said unto us, Ye shall not see my face, except your brother be with you." Still there was a painful struggle in the breast of Jacob, before he could make up his mind to part with his now favourite son; and he sought to avoid coming to a decision, by preferring a complaint against his sons, which, whether well founded or not, was then too late, and therefore unavailing. "Wherefore," said he, "dealt ye so ill with me, as to tell the man whether ye had yet a brother?" But the necessities of his children, and of his children's children, amounting to threescore and six souls, reconciled him at last to a temporary separation from Benjamin: and he said to his sons, "If it must be so now, do this; Take of the best fruits in the land in your vessels, and carry down the man a present, a little balm, and a little honey, spices, and myrrh, nuts, and almonds. And take double money in your hand; and the money that was brought again in the mouth of your sacks, carry it again in your hand; peradventure it was an oversight. Take also your brother, and arise, go again unto the man: and God Almighty give you mercy before the man, that he may send away your

other brother, and Benjamin. If I be bereaved of my children, I am bereaved." On this second occasion of their going down into Egypt, Joseph, after subjecting his brethren to trials, which elicited gratifying proofs of penitence for their former delinquencies, as well as of filial regard for their aged father, made himself known to them, and sent them back to Canaan to their father Jacob, with, to him, the astonishing, the almost incredible intelligence, "Joseph is yet alive, and he is governor over all the land of Egypt." On receiving this intelligence, "Jacob's heart," we are told, "fainted, for he believed them not." But when they told him all that Joseph had said to them,—how, by Pharaoh's express request, he had invited his father, and brethren, and their households, to come down to him, and promised to give them the good of the land of Egypt;—"and when he saw the waggons which Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of Jacob their father revived: and Israel said, It is enough; Joseph my son is yet alive: I will go and see him before I die." And it was in pursuance of this purpose to go down into Egypt that "Israel took his journey with all that he had, and came to Beer-sheba, and offered sacrifices unto the God of his father Isaac."

It will readily be admitted, that the resolution which Jacob formed of going down to Egypt to see Joseph was a very natural one,—one which no father in such circumstances could have refrained from forming. For at least two-and-twenty years he had looked upon his son as dead—as having, in fact, suffered a violent death; and when we bear in mind that he was his favourite son, being the son of his old age, we can see enough in the simple fact of his being alive to induce his father to encounter both danger and fatigue for the inexpressible gratification of seeing him. And it was evidently under the impulse of this feeling that he at once formed the resolution of undertaking a journey to Egypt. "It is enough," said he; "Joseph my son is yet alive: I will go and see him before I die." But though this resolution could not fail to be strengthened by what his sons told him of Joseph's greatness in the land of Egypt,—inasmuch as he could not fail to see in that greatness a most marvellous interposition of divine providence,—yet it would appear that on reflection he had begun to doubt whether it was not a hasty resolution, and one, therefore, which he was not at liberty to carry into effect.

When God condescended to speak to him in the visions of the night, he thus addressed him, "I am God, the God of thy father: fear not to go down into Egypt;"—words which plainly imply that there were doubts or misgivings in the mind of Jacob on the subject of his intended journey. We can hardly suppose, however, that these doubts related merely to the fatigue which he might undergo, and the danger which he might encounter on his way to Egypt, or to the reception which he might experience on his arrival there: for we cannot doubt, I think, that his affection for Joseph, and the prospect of once more seeing him, to say nothing of the means which had been provided for his journey, and the comfortable dwelling-place which had been prepared for him, had raised him above all such fears and anxieties about his personal safety. His doubts, therefore, must have had respect to his posterity, and to the fulfilment of the promise sworn to Abraham, and repeatedly confirmed to Isaac, as well as to himself. And so the passage under consideration plainly intimates: for in the divine communication which was vouchsafed to him, and in which it was said, "Fear not to go down into Egypt," it was immediately added, "For I will there make of thee a great nation: I will go down with thee into Egypt; and I will also surely bring thee up again: and Joseph shall put his hand upon thine eyes."

It is plain, from all this, that the question which had occurred to Jacob, and by which he was perplexed, was, whether by going down into Egypt, he was not taking a step which would prevent the fulfilment of the promise, that the land of Canaan should be the inheritance of his posterity,—a promise which was inseparable from another of infinite moment to him, as well as to all the families of the earth, even the appearance in due time of the Saviour, whose day he and his fathers saw afar off, and were glad. Such a question, indeed, could hardly fail to occur to Jacob in such circumstances, accustomed as he was to look habitually to the promise, as the source of all his consolation amidst the manifold afflictions of the present life, and the only foundation of his hope in looking forward to another. He might naturally ask himself, whether, for his own personal gratification, he was not about to place his family in circumstances, not only full of immediate danger to the spiritual interests of every individual

of that family, but calculated to prevent them from ever becoming, as a people, the possessors of the land of Canaan: for if he once took up his abode in the land of Egypt, where he had no divine warrant for residing, how could he expect that his posterity were to remain in a state of separation from the Egyptians, and not in the course of time become identified with them, and hopelessly enslaved by their abominable idolatries? Though impelled, therefore, by the strongest personal motive by which a man could be influenced, the desire of seeing a long-lost son,—a son peculiarly dear to him,—and one who, by the most marvellous interposition of providence, had been elevated to power and honour, second only to the mightiest monarch in the world; yet he did not lose sight of the far more important concerns of his family, and of the Church: and we are warranted, I think, to conclude, that he would have forfeited the gratification even of seeing Joseph, if he had thought that he was thereby putting in jeopardy the possession promised to him, and to his seed after him. When he came to Beer-sheba, and there "offered sacrifices unto the God of his father Isaac," it was, I conceive, for the purpose of seeking divine counsel to guide him in his perplexities—to spread out his fears and his anxieties before God; and it was in answer to his prayers, that the Lord said to him in the visions of the night, "I am God, the God of thy father: fear not to go down into Egypt; for I will there make of thee a great nation."

It thus appears that the patriarch, even in the prospect of a personal gratification, the most desirable and the most allowable, perhaps, which it is possible for a man to enjoy, was anxious to subordinate that gratification to the higher interests of his family and of the Church; and God was graciously pleased to grant him his desire respecting his son, and at the same time to assure him that the gratification of that desire should not interfere with the promise renewed to him at Bethel, when the Lord said to him, "The land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed: and thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth; and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south; and in thee, and in thy seed, shall all the families of the earth be blessed." The consideration which removed all Jacob's doubts and fears about going down into Egypt, was the assurance that he should there become a great nation.

"Fear not to go down into Egypt; for I will there make of thee a great nation." There was no doubt a promise also given which seemed to refer to himself personally; for it was added, "I will go down with thee into Egypt; and I will also surely bring thee up again." But, in reality, this promise referred mainly to Jacob's posterity, who, it will be observed, were often identified with himself, as when it was said, "I will make of thee a great nation,"—an event which it is obvious he could not live to see. And so in the case before us. Jacob never saw the land of Canaan again; though, in the faith of the promise renewed to him on the occasion before us, he made his sons swear to him that they would bury him there, as a pledge to his posterity that he had taken possession of the promised inheritance for their behoof. The promise, therefore, "I will also surely bring thee up again," must have referred mainly to his children; and a very plain intimation of this was given to Jacob, when it was said to him, "And Joseph shall put his hand upon thine eyes;" for when he considered the place which Joseph occupied, and the momentous services which he had rendered, and was still to render, not to Egypt only, but to all the countries round about; Jacob could not suppose that his son was to return with him to Canaan, and there to close his eyes. But, the covenant being sure, the patriarch was content to end his eventful and weary pilgrimage wherever God might be pleased to appoint; and while he thus made the promise, on which was suspended his own salvation and that of the Church, his chief concern, God was pleased to crowd into the evening of the patriarch's days comforts and enjoyments, sufficient of themselves to compensate for many previous years of sorrow and sadness. Not only did he again embrace a dear and long-lost son,—but that son was restored to him as the child of God's special providence,—himself preserved from many perils, that he might be the instrument of preserving countless multitudes of his fellow-men,—possessed of the power to shelter and cherish his brethren in their season of adversity,—and at last permitted to close the eyes of his affectionate and beloved father.

Worldly comforts so great and so numerous may not be in reserve for every true believer. But every believer is taught by the patriarch's example how to prepare for a peaceful and a happy

death. If the manifestation of God's glory, so far as they can be instrumental in manifesting it, be their chief object, that to which they would willingly subordinate everything else,—if, in all that concerns the worldly comfort of themselves and their households, they are anxious to seek divine guidance, and to secure the divine blessing,—and if, even in regard to their favourite schemes, they are willing to bring these to the test of God's Word, and abide by its decision, even if that decision were that they should abandon them; then they may rest assured, that they will, in some measure, participate in the satisfaction which the patriarch experienced, when he went down to Egypt under the sanction of the divine approbation, and enjoyed all the comforts of his seventeen years' residence there, not only as the gifts of the divine bounty, but as pledges of what was unspeakably more valuable to him than any worldly comforts,—the fulfilment, in due time, of all the good things which the Lord had spoken concerning him and his seed. They may not, perhaps, experience any remarkable or unexpected interpositions: for they are not taught to look for their portion here. They may continue to be tried, even to the last, with afflictions both numerous and severe, because God sees it needful for their best interests that these trials should be increased, rather than diminished; and, to outward appearance, the close of their life, instead of presenting any wonderful instance of an unexpected accumulation of worldly comforts, may be the very reverse of what Jacob's was,—exhibiting an accumulation only of afflictions and trials. But though it may be so, they will be partakers of consolation and comfort which the world knoweth not of. They will experience alleviations of suffering, which they could have as little reckoned on, as Jacob could on the comforts which gladdened his declining years; in manifold instances their fears will be disappointed, and their hopes more than realised, on subjects far more important to their happiness than any one but themselves can conceive; and being brought by the grace of God, and, it may be, by means of suffering, into a resigned and submissive frame of spirit, wishing to have nothing in their lot altered if it is not God's will to alter it, they will find, even amidst the appearance, to others, of nothing but sorrow and suffering and innumerable ills, the fulfilment of the precious pro-

mise, "Delight thyself in the Lord, and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart."

But I have remarked that the period referred to in the passage under consideration was a remarkable one in the history of the Church, as well as in the personal history of Jacob. And the truth of this remark must be evident to every one who is familiar with that history, and has reflected at all on the consequences of Jacob's going down to Egypt, as these affected the future condition of his posterity. The call of Abraham, it will be remembered, was the provision which God was pleased to make for preserving the knowledge and worship of himself amidst the growing idolatry of the world,—and especially for preparing the way for the coming of Him in whom all the families of the earth are to be blessed. It is to the family of Abraham, therefore, that we are to look, subsequently to his call, for the manifestations of God's favour to his church, and for the maintenance and propagation of the true religion in the world. I do not mean by this remark to assert, that when Abraham was selected by the special grace of God to occupy so prominent a place in the Church as to be called "the father of the faithful" and "the friend of God," there were no other true believers besides himself, or that there were not many, even at a much later period, who by faith in the truth as handed down by Noah, lived and died in the well-grounded hope of a heavenly inheritance. But it is to Abraham's family that we must look for the visible Church; and after a certain period, it was to them that new communications of the divine will, and new revelations of divine mercy through a Saviour, were exclusively made. In that family, too, was bound up the promise of Christ; so that the preservation of that family, and in a state of separation, too, from the other families of the earth, was essential to the fulfilment of God's gracious purpose for the salvation of his people. Now, bearing this in remembrance, we cannot fail to perceive, that the parties mainly concerned in the transactions and events connected with the sore famine which prevailed, not in Egypt only, but in all lands, were Jacob and his family. That there were other and most important purposes to be served by that visitation of divine judgment, we cannot doubt; for then, as well as in other ages of the world, iniquity did sufficiently abound to

call for the revelation of the wrath of God against the unrighteousness and ungodliness of men. But it did in a very peculiar manner concern the Church, the family which God had selected whereby to reveal gradually, and in the fulness of time to carry into effect, his gracious purpose for the redemption of a lost world. It was the immediate means of bringing about what had been foretold to Abraham two hundred years before, that his posterity were to be strangers in a land that was not theirs, and should there be afflicted and oppressed till God should interpose for their deliverance, and bring them up again with great substance into the land of Canaan. It was the means of raising up, in the person of Joseph, a testimony for the supremacy of the true God, amidst the idolatries of the surrounding nations, which might operate, to a greater extent than we can venture to estimate, in turning multitudes from their vain idols to the knowledge and worship of the God of Abraham. But however this may be, it was the occasion of such a manifestation of the divine faithfulness and power on behalf of his people as cannot be mistaken, and can never, I think, be perused without affording consolation, and furnishing abundant matter for devout meditation to true believers. The family of Jacob, that chosen family, from which, after the flesh, Christ was to come, were reduced to great straits, —threatened with being altogether extirpated; and though they found relief in these straits from the same quarter, and in the same way as multitudes both in Canaan and in other lands found relief, yet it is impossible to read the history of Joseph without feeling convinced, that all the marvellous events which befell him were overruled and determined, with a special regard to his father's family; and that, however extensive might be the blessings which God, in his mercy and forbearance, bestowed upon Egypt and upon other lands, through the instrumentality of Joseph, the main design of his elevation to power and influence was the preservation of the seed of Abraham. And so did Joseph himself interpret the marvellous dealings of God's providence with him, when he said to his brethren, "God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance." Jacob's family, it is true, was only one among the thousands that were saved from perishing by the provision which Joseph was directed to make during

the seven years of plenty, to meet the necessities of seven years of famine; and in the eye of the world there might appear to be nothing remarkable in Jacob's case, unless perhaps the interest which might for a season attach to him as the father of Joseph, the benefactor of their country. Yet it was mainly on Jacob's account that the provision was made, in which such vast multitudes participated; for, however important might be the other purposes, whether of judgment or of mercy, which God had to accomplish by that dispensation, that which infinitely surpassed them all in importance to our fallen race was the preservation of the patriarch's family, the holy seed from which the Saviour was to come; and in that event, therefore, we have a most illustrious display of the character of God, as the God of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob,—the faithful and the covenant-keeping God, who is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working.

It may, perhaps, occur, on thus viewing the subject of Jacob's removal from Canaan to Egypt, that provision might have been made for the preservation of the patriarch and his family, and consequently for the fulfilment of the promise made to Abraham, without the intervention of all the incidents that befell Joseph, and the various interpositions which took place to bring about the intended result. And no doubt it might have been so, if such had been the will of God. But, in the first place, it is to be observed that suffering, in one form or another, seems to be essential to the restoration of fallen creatures from a state of sin to a state of holiness. Not only may we infer this from the fact, that it is the ordination of God, announced in explicit terms, that through much tribulation we must enter into the kingdom of heaven,—but it commends itself to the understanding of every true Christian, as an ordination at once wise and gracious, inasmuch as a course of uninterrupted worldly comfort has an obvious tendency, and, in point of fact, never fails to disincline sinful creatures to entertain serious thoughts of a future and a better inheritance. And in illustration of this remark we need go no farther than the history before us; for none can read that history without feeling convinced, that Jacob's sons were brought to a sense of their sin against their unoffending brother by the severe discipline through which they passed, when once and again they stood in his presence, trembling and

conscience-stricken, ere yet they knew who he was,—and afterwards, when they did know him, as they never would have been, had they passed their lives in worldly peace and plenty in the land of Canaan. And, on the same principle, God saw it meet for the interests of the children of Israel themselves, as well as for the instruction of the Church in all subsequent times, that they should be afflicted and evil entreated for a long season in a land that was not theirs.

But we are farther to remember, that the great purpose for which God chose the people of Israel to be a peculiar people unto himself,—and the purpose, indeed, for which, from the beginning, he revealed his scheme of redeeming a Church from among the fallen and guilty children of men,—was to magnify his great name,—to unfold the glorious perfections of his nature,—to deal so with his people as that they might be to him for a name, and for a praise, and for a glory,—and to make known by the Church, even to principalities and powers, the manifold wisdom of God. Now it is obvious, both from the character and condition of men as sinners, and also as a matter of fact, that this purpose is best accomplished by the deliverances which he has wrought, and will continue to work out for his people, from those trials and afflictions which are the natural consequences either of their own sins, or the sins of the world around them. And this consideration will ever be sufficient to reconcile true Christians to the divine dispensations towards them, even when these are of an afflictive nature. It is as true of real Christians, as it was of Israel of old, that God has chosen them, and has made them cleave unto him, that they may be to him for a name, and for a praise, and for a glory in the earth: for an inspired writer in the New Testament thus addresses them,—"Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light." And if such be their high and holy vocation,—such the great end which is to be accomplished in and by them,—such the honourable place which has been appointed them among the intelligent creatures of God; can they quarrel with the manner in which he requires them to fulfil that great end, or doubt either his grace or his wisdom, though it may be by much tribulation that they are to glorify

his great name? To say nothing of the blessed effects of sanctified affliction to their own souls, which are sufficient to silence all complaint, it ought to be a source of unspeakable consolation to them to reflect, that they may bear witness to the efficacy of divine grace, and may advance the divine glory as largely, by their patient endurance of trial, as by the active discharge of every Christian duty. There may be no wonderful deliverance wrought on their behalf, as there was wont to be of old, both for individuals, and for the Church collectively. But deliverances they will experience if they submit themselves meekly to the divine disposal,—and the effects of these will appear in the growing holiness of their heart and life: for what was the redemption of the Church in former times from temporal affliction and trouble, but the type of spiritual redemption, deliverance from the bondage of corruption, and translation into the liberty of the sons of God? Well, therefore, may they "rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, they are in heaviness through manifold temptations: that the trial of their faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise, and honour, and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ."

XX.

THE BLESSING ON JUDAH.

GENESIS XLIX. 8-12.

THE state of the Church at the time of Jacob's death was, in some respects, more promising than it had been, perhaps, at any former period. I say, in some respects; for, in one point of view, that state might appear to be very dark and unpromising. It was Jacob's family that was to constitute the visible Church, the community or people to which divine communications concerning the great scheme of redemption were to be mainly, if not exclusively confined; and the establishment of that family in Canaan, according to the frequently repeated declarations of God, was essential to the full manifestation of his gracious purposes for the salvation of his Church. When that family, then, was compelled by famine to leave Canaan without any prospect of immediately returning thither,—nay, with the certainty of sojourning for a long time in Egypt,—it might appear that the progress towards fulfilment of the promise made to Abraham, if not arrested so as never to advance farther, was, by that event, to be greatly retarded. But the very reverse was to be the result, as indeed had been intimated to Abraham himself more than two hundred years before, when it was said to him, "Thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; and also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge; and afterward shall they come out with great substance." For though they were

thus removed for a season from the land of promise, and apparently exposed to the danger of being ultimately scattered among the Egyptians, yet, not only were they there to become a great nation, according to the express assurance given to Jacob when he set out on his journey thither, but they were to grow into a mighty people, in circumstances in which there were to be manifestations of the supremacy and perfections of God, such as had never before been displayed on behalf of his Church, and such as we cannot conceive to have taken place, had Israel continued to dwell in the land of Canaan.

Nor was it long ere God was pleased to afford the plainest indications of the sure, and, considering the nature of the thing, the speedy fulfilment of his marvellous purposes. Jacob, after a life of much labour and manifold trials, was permitted to enjoy seventeen years of peace and quietness, during which he witnessed a great deal to unfold to him the wisdom of the divine appointments, and to strengthen his confidence in the divine faithfulness. Not only did he see his family established, in a state of separation from the Egyptians, in the land of Goshen, wherein they had possessions, and where they grew and multiplied exceedingly, but he saw, and was privileged to bless the children of his beloved son Joseph, and that in such a way and in such terms as to show, not merely that his blessing was the prayer of a devout and affectionate father committing his beloved children to the care of that God who had fed him all his life long,—the keeping of the Angel which had redeemed him from all evil,—but that it was a blessing which would infallibly take effect,—that he spoke and acted under the guidance, and by the movement of the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of prophecy,—that to him had been largely fulfilled the declaration which was afterwards recorded as the experience of the saints, "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him, and he will show them his covenant."

In that blessing, he preferred Ephraim the younger to Manasseh the elder; for "he stretched out his right hand, and laid it upon Ephraim's head, who was the younger, and his left hand upon Manasseh's head," though Joseph had presented them in such a way as would naturally have secured Jacob's right hand to Manasseh, and his left to Ephraim. Jacob's eyes, indeed,

"were dim for age, so that he could not see;" and Joseph accordingly, ascribing his father's action to his blindness, endeavoured to rectify what he thought Jacob's mistake, by removing his right hand from Ephraim to Manasseh. But Jacob was not mistaken,—he guided "his hands wittingly,"—wittingly in the true sense of the word, being under the infallible guidance of the Spirit of God: and, therefore, when Joseph said to him, "Not so, my father: for this is the first-born; put thy right hand upon his head,"—"his father refused, and said, I know it, my son, I know it: he also shall become a people, and he also shall be great: but truly his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his seed shall become a multitude of nations. And he blessed them that day, saying, In thee shall Israel bless, saying, God make thee as Ephraim and as Manasseh: and he set Ephraim before Manasseh."

I need not remind those who are familiar with the Word of God, that in the 5th Chapter of 1st Chronicles, it is declared that though Reuben was the first-born of Israel, yet by an act of guilt he lost his birthright, which was given to the sons of Joseph,—and that in accordance with this, the kingdom of Israel, as distinguished from that of Judah, was afterwards, times without number, in the writings of the prophets, denominated Ephraim. Neither is it necessary to dwell on the testimony here given to the absolute sovereignty of God in putting the younger of Joseph's children before the elder. A similar manifestation of that sovereignty was made in the case of Jacob himself, of whom it was declared before he was born that he should be superior to his brother; and concerning whom it was afterwards said in still stronger terms, "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated." These are testimonies to God's absolute sovereignty, which, however offensive the doctrine may be to the carnal mind, it is impossible to dispute or to explain away. But, at present, we have especially to do with what was the state of the Church at the time of Jacob's death. I have already stated that, in some respects, it was more promising than at any former period; and this statement is, I think, fully established by what is recorded of Jacob's last days in the preceding chapters. During these days he saw his family, the Church, growing and multiplying exceedingly; he foresaw, in the spirit of prophecy,

not only the general prosperity and power of Joseph's children, but the comparative wealth and greatness which they were respectively to attain; his blessing in itself, as well as in the manner in which it was uttered, implied such a clearness of apprehension as to its nature, and such a feeling of certainty in regard to its fulfilment, as resembled more the description of what was present, than a prediction of what could be accomplished only after many successive generations: and that it was all connected with the great promise, the promise of a Saviour, he very emphatically declared, when he said to Joseph, after blessing his sons, "Behold, I die; but God shall be with you, and bring you again unto the land of your fathers."

Though nothing more had been recorded of the last days of the patriarch than what we find in the preceding chapters, we might have concluded that they were the happiest days of his life, and that his main happiness arose from the sure prospect that was opened up to him of the increase and prosperity of his family, as the chosen people of God, and of the coming of Him in whom all the families of the earth were to be blessed. But what we have already seen is but a small part of the glorious prospect which was unfolded to the dying patriarch. In the chapter before us, we find him pronouncing a blessing on each of his sons successively, wherein he expressly foretold, not only that their families should continue separate and distinct tribes, but that certain events should occur, and certain lots be assigned to them, according to their respective characters. In the case of some of them, as Reuben, Simeon, and Levi, it may appear that their father pronounced upon them a curse, rather than a blessing,—a prediction of evil, rather than a promise of good. But it must be remembered, that the lot which he assigned to them, whether it was prosperous or adverse, was not, and could not be understood as absolute and unvarying. If, for example, prosperity was foretold of any one of them, it did not follow that nothing but what was prosperous could ever befall them, whatever their conduct might be; because such an ordination would have been inconsistent with the great principles on which the moral government of God is conducted: for however large and apparently unqualified his promises might be, he could not but reserve to himself, for the vindication of his own rectitude,

and the manifestation of his glory, as well as for the best interests of his people themselves, the power and prerogative of visiting "their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes." And in like manner, if apparent evil was foretold of any of them, it did not follow that nothing but misfortune and disaster were to befall them: for what was really evil in their lot might be converted into a blessing to themselves, as well as a solemn, instructive, and most salutary warning to others. And of this remark we have a striking example in the case of Levi. Of him, and of his brother Simeon, Jacob said, because of their perfidious and bloody conduct towards the men of Shechem, "Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath for it was cruel: I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel." And so it was literally with Levi's family. They had no inheritance among their brethren,—they were scattered among all the tribes. Yet a peculiar honour was put upon them, inasmuch as they were separated and set apart for the more immediate service of God, and it was declared of them that the Lord himself was their inheritance.

It was thus that the predictions of apparent evil to the various tribes of Israel might be fulfilled, and might accomplish all the wise purposes, both of bearing testimony to the rectitude of God, and furnishing most important and instructive lessons to the Church, while these tribes did at the same time participate largely in all the blessings, both temporal and spiritual, which were comprehended in the Abrahamic Covenant. And then, with regard to the future condition of these tribes being inseparably connected with, or rather, it appears, determined by the character and conduct of their respective fathers, as in the cases of Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and others, I need hardly remark, that the principle involved in this ordination is one which we see every day in operation, in the moral government of the world, and one which cannot but operate in a sinful world, under the overruling providence of a holy and righteous Governor. From the very nature of things, and from the relations which subsist between man and man, the character of a parent must affect the condition and circumstances of his children: and where that character is evil, the consequences, in the natural course of events, would be felt, not by his own children only, but to successive

generations, unless counteracted by other arrangements of providence and grace, which the individual could not foresee, and had no right to reckon on. Not only will it be universally admitted, as a matter of fact, that this would take place, but it will be acknowledged that in the nature of things it cannot be otherwise; and a little reflection will be sufficient to lead to the conclusion, moreover, that the ordination is as gracious as it is just, furnishing the strongest motives which can be presented to the natural feelings and affections of men, to induce them to abandon the course which would entail misery upon their children, as well as upon themselves, and to follow that in which they may hope to treasure up a blessing for their posterity.

The ground, then, of Jacob's prediction concerning the future lot of his family, in so far as the condition of the various tribes was made dependent on the conduct of their respective fathers, was just a very striking exemplification of the great principle which pervades the moral administration of God in his dealings with the children of men; and in directing Jacob to embody that principle in his dying address to his children, care was taken to keep the principle itself present to the minds of his posterity, and thereby to furnish them with a very solemn and salutary warning. That his posterity did so remember and improve it, I do not assert. I fear they did not, any more than they remembered and improved many other marvellous dispensations of God's providence towards them. But this does not affect the gracious nature of the provision which was made for keeping Israel habitually in mind, that their character and conduct would not only determine their own condition, but go far to decide that of their children after them. And if they did bear in mind their father's dying blessing, and were careful to transmit it to succeeding generations, how full of interest must it have been to those who witnessed the fulfilment of its predictions in the various lots which were assigned to the tribes on their settlement in Canaan! Even from the very brief record which we have of that settlement, we can discover in the history of the twelve tribes many striking instances of the accomplishment of Jacob's prophecy. But there must have been many circumstances, not recorded, which were calculated to bring the patriarch's dying blessing very vividly to the recollection of his posterity, and

thereby to strengthen their confidence in the faithfulness of the great promise. And with regard to Jacob himself, what marvellous views must have been presented to his mind, both of the providence and of the grace of God, when there were spread out before him a grand outline of the history of his race, down to the coming of Christ, and when, with the infallible assurance, that, amidst all the temporary reverses and trials which might befall them, they would be preserved a separate and distinct, as well as a distinguished people, till the promised Seed should come, he "called unto his sons, and said, Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you that which shall befall you in the last days: gather yourselves together, and hear, ye sons of Jacob; and hearken unto Israel your father!"

I do not think it necessary, in illustration of these remarks, to enter on a particular examination of Jacob's blessing, as pronounced on each of his sons in succession. There is one of them, that contained in the passage before us, in which all the tribes were equally interested; for it was that in which God declared, in the exercise of the same sovereignty to which I have already referred, that Judah was the person from whom He was to spring who was to rule over his people Israel. Why Judah was selected for this high honour, human wisdom can give no reason, any more than it can explain why it was that, before Esau and Jacob were born, it was said of them, "The elder shall serve the younger." It was the determination of Him who worketh all his pleasure in heaven above and on the earth beneath, and who giveth no account of any of his matters. But such being the divine purpose,—such the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God,—he was pleased to reveal it to his servant Jacob; and of all the glorious visions which passed before the mind of the patriarch, while under the immediate inspiration of the Holy Ghost, the most glorious must have been that which brought under his view the place which was to be occupied by the family of his son Judah. That son had been named Judah by his mother at his birth, because she had special reason, as she believed, to praise the Lord,—the word Judah signifying "praise." It would appear that, though unconscious of it, she spoke prophetically; for Jacob commenced his benediction on Judah by declaring that his name indicated his future greatness,—"Judah,

thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise." He then proceeds to declare, not only that all his enemies were to be finally subdued under him, but that all the other tribes of Israel were to acknowledge him as their lord and king,—that he was to be as a lion's whelp,—as a lion whose power none could resist, whose authority none dared to dispute,—who, when necessary, would vindicate that power and authority, by taking vengeance on his enemies, but who, with the generosity that accompanies conscious power, would exercise great compassion and forbearance. "Thy hand shall be in the neck of thine enemies; thy father's children shall bow down before thee. Judah is a lion's whelp: from the prey, my son, thou art gone up: he stooped down, he couched as a lion, and as an old lion; who shall rouse him up?"

It were easy to point out various circumstances in the future history of Judah which fell out in strict accordance with this part of Jacob's prediction. When the tribes of Israel, weary of the immediate sovereignty of God as their king, clamorously required that they might have a king appointed from among themselves, like the nations that were round about them, God granted them their request in the way of chastisement; and Saul, of the tribe of Benjamin, was appointed to be their king. But when this appointment had accomplished its purpose of chastisement, —for chastisement Saul's reign did unquestionably prove,—when God had given them a king in his anger, and had taken him away in his wrath, then he chose "a man after his own heart," one of the tribe of Judah, according to his promise to Jacob,— "even David his servant," whom he took "from the sheep-folds, to feed Jacob his people, and Israel his inheritance." But though in the personal history of David, as well as in the history of Judah, even after the revolt of the other ten tribes, when the might and power of David's house were gloriously displayed,—though in all this we might find a great deal which was included in the patriarch's blessing; yet the full import of that blessing cannot be exhausted till we carry it forward and apply it to Him who was by descent of the royal seed of Judah,—who is emphatically denominated the Lion of the tribe of Judah,—and whose character, as combining a divine power, and a divine generosity and forbearance, is here set forth in language which cannot be claimed or appropriated by any mere man. He has indeed gone up

"from the prey," for he has ascended up on high, leading captivity captive, "having spoiled principalities and powers, making a show of them openly, triumphing over them in his cross:" and though now exercising much forbearance and long-suffering, yet he is still "the Lion of the tribe of Judah," and who shall dare to rouse him up? Many, alas! dare to do so; and if they persist in doing so, he will one day be roused up, and revealed "in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ."

As we advance in the examination of the blessing pronounced on Judah, we find increasing evidence that Christ was the person mainly referred to in that blessing. "The sceptre," says Jacob, "shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be." This prediction plainly intimates, that the time would come when Judah, notwithstanding all the glorious things that were foretold of that tribe, and which were to be fulfilled in its actual history, was to lose the sceptre which it had long wielded, and be deprived of the power which for ages it had exercised; and that, at the very point of time when this was about to take place, a glorious person, here denominated Shiloh, the author of peace, should come; and that unto him the gathering of the people, or nations, should be. And such, literally, were the circumstances in which Christ appeared. Through many ages, and amidst many fluctuations and reverses, there was still a sceptre in Judah,—a ruler, to whom that tribe looked as their sovereign,—while the ten tribes were carried into hopeless captivity. But the power of Judah was fast going into decay for some time before Christ appeared. Though the semblance of a distinct and separate kingdom was preserved to them, they were in reality gradually sinking into the condition of a mere province of the Roman empire; and at the very time when Christ came, the last remnant of their independence as a nation, the power of life and death, was wrested from them,—so that the trial and condemnation of our Lord himself took place before a heathen tribunal,—the judgment-seat of Pilate, the Roman governor. The sceptre, therefore, did not depart from Judah till Shiloh came; and to Him were gathered not only the true Israel, the spiritual seed of Abraham, but men of all nations, Gentiles as well as Jews.

And, in conclusion, Jacob sets forth, in highly figurative but most expressive language, the abundance of spiritual blessings which Shiloh had prepared for those who should be gathered to him. This representation is borrowed from those objects which men are wont to regard as the surest marks of the fertility of a country,—namely, abundance of wine and milk; and the vine, accordingly, is spoken of as being, under Messiah's reign, as common as the forest tree, and wine and milk as abundant as water. "Binding his foal unto the vine, and his ass's colt unto the choice vine; he washed his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes: his eyes shall be red with wine, and his teeth white with milk." And did this view of the passage require any confirmation or commentary, it is to be found in a passage of Isaiah, where the prophet sets forth the blessings of Christ's salvation under the same figure, and in allusion, perhaps, to this prediction:—"Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money: come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price."

Such was the vision of glory which was vouchsafed to the dying patriarch; and when, on the eve of his departure from a world which is to all, and had been especially to him, a world of care and trouble, he looked forward to the sure, the infallibly certain fulfilment of all that he had been commissioned to foretell, his death could hardly have been more triumphant, even if he had been translated in a chariot of fire. But how rich, moreover, was the legacy which in this blessing he bequeathed, not to Judah only, but to all the tribes which were to spring from his other sons! for if that blessing was kept in remembrance, it was sufficient to keep alive their faith and hope under any reverse or disaster to which at times they might be subjected. It was in itself a large addition to what had been foretold of the great Deliverer, who was to bless all the families of the earth; and it was stated, moreover, in such a way as to afford to humble and devout believers, in all subsequent times, a refuge to which they might flee, and in which they might hide themselves in safety and repose, till the calamities of the time were overpast. For whatever these calamities were,—whether their country was for a time overrun by foreign foes, or whether they were themselves

carried captive into a strange land, as they were by the king of Babylon,—they were assured that the sceptre should never altogether depart from Judah till He appeared who was to be recognised as King, not by the tribes of Israel only, but ultimately by all the nations of the earth. And we cannot doubt that many a humble and devout Israelite did find abundant consolation and encouragement, during seasons of great darkness and disaster, in the assurance that the sceptre should not depart from Judah till Shiloh came. And is not the subject full of interest and of comfort to believers still? for what ought to be, or what can be, more interesting to devout minds than to trace in the divine communications, from the beginning, the dawn and the progress of that light which has issued in the full and effulgent glory of the Gospel,—and to contemplate, in the person and the work of Christ, the literal fulfilment of predictions delivered thousands of years before?

But there is another consideration naturally suggested by the subject before us, of a very solemn nature, and, if carefully pondered, of a very salutary tendency. It is evident that during the whole of the Old Testament dispensations, even from the fall till the coming of Christ, there was one grand subject on which the hopes and desires of the Church were placed; and that the peace and holiness of believers were always in proportion to the vividness with which they realised, and the steadfastness with which they contemplated that subject. The subject was the promise of a Saviour,—the appearing of Him who, as the seed of the woman, was to bruise the serpent's head,—the Lord, who, according to Enoch's prophecy, was to come with ten thousand of his saints,—the descendant of Abraham, in whom all the families of the earth were to be blessed,—Shiloh, to whom the gathering of the people was to be. This was the great, the glorious consummation to which the people of God looked forward, and in the hope of which they found their only resting-place amidst all the toils and tribulations of this present life. That consummation has long ago taken place. We now look back on a Saviour who has appeared, and on a work which has been finished; and it is in the believing contemplation of that work that we are to find peace and rest unto our souls. But, having found this rest, even the well-grounded hope of pardon

and acceptance with God, we too, as well as the Church under the old dispensation, have an object of hope and of desire to which we may and ought to look forward, with as intense interest as ever believers of old looked forward for the coming consolation of Israel. Christ has come, and has finished the work which his Father gave him to do,—even to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. But Christ is to come again; and to them who look for him, he will appear the second time without sin unto salvation.

Now, therefore, as well as of old, the coming of Christ is designed to be, and ought to be, and, in proportion to the strength of their faith and hope, will be, the object of expectation and desire to believers. And accordingly we find, that scarcely had Christ ascended into heaven, and the apostles had entered on their public ministry, when they began to direct the faith and hope of the Church to Christ's second coming. In addressing those who were still in their sins, unregenerate and unbelieving men, the apostles did no doubt urge them to look back on the finished work of Christ,—the sacrifice which he had offered,—the atonement which he had made for sin; and their language to all such was, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." But in speaking or in writing to those whom in charity they believed to be Christians,—true believers,—they urged them to look forward to Christ's second coming, as that which was to animate and encourage them in all their difficulties, and to refresh their spirits under all the trials which might at times depress or perplex them. The subject is no doubt presented as a very solemn one, designed to warn even Christians to watch and be in readiness when their Lord cometh. But it is also and frequently set forth as in its own nature a most joyful and encouraging event; and can that man's state, therefore, be a safe one, who remains contented with his condition, while Christ's second coming is an object of dread rather than of hope? Oh, if we could but look forward to that coming with joyful anticipation!—and why should we not, it being alike our duty and our privilege to do so? What singleness of eye, what simplicity of mind, what godly sincerity of purpose, would it impart to us in labouring to advance the divine glory, and promote the well-being of our fellow-men! It is this only that

will lead us to form a just estimate of present things, and thoroughly reconcile us to those dispensations of God's providence whereby present enjoyments are broken in upon or withdrawn. We all profess to be but pilgrims and strangers here. But what is there of the spirit and feelings of pilgrims about us, if we have not found, or if we are not seeking to find, in the hope, the joyful expectation of Christ's second coming, that consolation and support which believers of old derived from the prospect of his first appearing, when they saw his day, though afar off, and were glad?

XXI.

THE BONDAGE OF ISRAEL IN EGYPT.

EXODUS II. 23.

THESE few words convey, and in a very emphatic manner, a great deal of information respecting the miserable condition to which the people of Israel were reduced in the land of Egypt. In the preceding chapter, we have such a description of the degradation and wretchedness to which they had been brought, as would naturally have led us to suppose that their oppression had been dictated by some personal feeling on the part of the then king of Egypt,—that he had, in some way or other, contracted a peculiar aversion to the Israelites, or had surrendered himself to some strange overcharged fear or suspicion as to the danger which he and his people might be exposed to at their hand, or the loss which he might sustain by their suddenly leaving his country; but that the ferocious cruelty with which they were treated would assuredly terminate with his life. Not only did he set over the Israelites "taskmasters to afflict them with their burdens," and make "their lives bitter with hard bondage," so that all their service wherein they were made to serve was with rigour; but he commanded them to be treated as if they had not been human beings,—issuing a decree that every male child of the Hebrews should be cast into the river. We could suppose,—for, alas! the history of the world fully justifies the supposition,—that a tyrant might have power enough, for a time, to give effect even to so monstrous a decree as this; and

that if his craft and cunning were equal to his cruelty, he might have contrived to keep that decree in force during his life. But the decree itself was so revolting to the feelings of human nature, fallen and depraved as that nature is, that we could conceive it to have been hateful to all, except, perhaps, the most profligate of the king's agents, who were prepared to perpetrate any crime from the base love of gain ; and when in process of time the king of Egypt died, it might have been expected, not only that the oppressed Israelites would experience a respite from the cruel, the inhuman oppression under which they groaned, but that the Egyptians themselves would feel relieved and lightened of a terrible burden, in being no longer compelled to act as instruments in executing a decree which was fit only to have been issued against the most noxious of wild beasts.

That the decree was a most unnatural and revolting one is very strikingly illustrated by the conduct of Pharaoh's daughter towards Moses ; for though she could have heard nothing concerning the Israelites but what was calculated to degrade them in her estimation, and lead her to regard them as unworthy of being treated as human beings, yet when she looked on the helpless babe, and when the babe wept, she had compassion on him. And who can doubt that there was scarcely a female in Egypt who would not, if she had dared, have acted in a similar way ? The king's edict, therefore, was one which, from its doing violence to the instinctive feelings of our nature, we might suppose could not be maintained or carried into effect, but by some extraordinary skill or power on the part of the tyrant who issued it; and when the sacred historian proceeds to tell us that in the course of time that tyrant, or, it may be, a successor like himself, went the way of all the earth, we might have expected him to add, that the people of Israel experienced, in consequence of that event, some mitigation of their sufferings,—a respite, at least, not only from the monstrous edict to which I have been referring, but from the other cruel exactions under which they laboured. But to such a depth of degradation and contempt had they sunk in the eyes of the Egyptians, and so much reconciled had Pharaoh's people become to the horrid cruelties which he had required them to perpetrate, that the king's death, or the death of one king after another, so far from bringing the people

of Israel enlargement or relief, seems to have added to the bitterness of their bondage, and to have brought them to that point of misery and helplessness where a divine interposition was necessary to vindicate the divine faithfulness in the promises made unto their fathers; for it is said in the passage under consideration,—"And it came to pass in process of time, that the king of Egypt died: and the children of Israel sighed by reason of the bondage, and they cried, and their cry came up unto God by reason of the bondage."

Now, the question naturally occurs, why were the people of Israel, the family of Abraham, the chosen people of God, subjected to such severe and so long-continued oppression? They were not in the condition or circumstances of any other people on earth, so as to be subjected, as every other people has been, to successive changes from prosperity to adversity, and from adversity to prosperity,—changes which are regarded as falling out in the ordinary course of things, and, therefore, such as are not thought surprising. Abraham had been selected as the special object of God's gracious favour,—manifold promises were made to him, of which few could be fulfilled in his personal experience, inasmuch as they related chiefly to his posterity,—in these promises it was foretold that his family should become a great nation,—and worldly prosperity occupied a prominent place in the inheritance which was secured to them by solemn covenant. If ever there was a family, therefore, or a people, which, more than another, might have been expected to escape worldly tribulations, it was assuredly the family of Abraham,—selected, as they had been, by the sovereign grace of God, to be his peculiar people, —and secured, as they were, by his unchangeable promise, in the possession of an inheritance, the best and the richest which the earth could furnish. Yet, in the providence of God, they were placed in the circumstances referred to in the passage we are considering, apparently for the very purpose of being afflicted and oppressed. They left Canaan under the pressure of a famine which, to all appearance, must have proved fatal to them if they had remained there. Egypt, of all the countries around them, was the only one that offered to them a refuge from the general calamity which had come upon the kingdoms. There they did find a refuge, and one, moreover, which had been pro-

vided for them by a most remarkable train of divine interpositions. And there they actually enjoyed, for a long period, such a measure of worldly comfort and prosperity as perhaps never fell to the lot of any other people. Yet, in the end, all this seemed to be only a preparation for the calamities which afterwards befell them; as if a combination of circumstances had been purposely arranged for bringing them into a state of suffering and affliction, almost, if not altogether, unexampled in the history of any other nation. And that this was in reality the divine purpose is evident from the fact, that, four hundred years before, it was intimated to Abraham that such should be the condition of his family.

And why was it that the people, whom God had chosen to be in a special manner his own people, were thus exposed, not only to such trials as fall to the lot of men generally, but to tribulations of peculiar severity? It was for the purpose of setting forth, in a very palpable and impressive manner, the great principle of the divine procedure in the economy of grace, whereby it is ordained, that the discipline of affliction shall enter largely into the means whereby the people of God are prepared for the enjoyment of the inheritance which awaits them. The wisdom as well as the rectitude of this ordination ought, indeed, to be recognised by all who reflect for a moment on the character and condition of man. He is a sinful creature, and, as such, alienated from God and from holiness,—as incapable as he is unworthy of holding fellowship with the Creator, or finding happiness in that state and in those exercises of mind in which alone the true blessedness of intelligent creatures consists. If, therefore, he is ever to be fitted for the enjoyment of that blessedness, he must undergo a change of character which implies a renovation of his whole nature; and which is accordingly set forth in Scripture as a new creation, as being born again, as passing from death unto life, as being transformed in the renewing of his mind. But such a change will meet with resistance from the corrupt propensities of his own nature,—strengthened as these are by the temptations of the world around him. Not only, therefore, must the opposition of his own heart be overcome, but the allurements which seduce him from without must be deprived of their power; and for the accomplishment of this end, no means are

more obviously adapted than the discipline of affliction. No doubt, the power of God were adequate to effect this change without the use of any such means. But the question is not, what is the power of God adequate to accomplish? but, what is it befitting his wisdom and rectitude to do? and it is obvious that, on the principle which he has adopted, he acts in a way suited to the condition and character of man. And what more should be required to reconcile man to this ordination than a moment's reflection on the comparative littleness of time and its concerns, and the infinite importance of eternity and its awful realities? If they believe that, as sinners, they are in a fallen and ruined state, and that their recovery, if ever they are recovered, must be effected here, what should even a lifetime of trial be in their estimation, if it prove the means, in the hand of God, of helping on and perfecting that change whereby they are to be fitted for the enjoyment of a heavenly inheritance? But though men ought thus to see the wisdom of the divine procedure in employing the discipline of affliction, and ought to be reconciled to it, even in its severest form, when exercised towards themselves, yet they are in danger of forgetting the momentous truth that they are ruined, and that their recovery ought to be their first and great concern. They are prone to seek after a portion in this present life, and to engage in the pursuit of it as if there were nothing wrong with them, nothing to be rectified with reference to the life that is to come; and when disappointment and affliction overtake them, they are apt to regard these as they affect their worldly comfort, and to forget the design of them as bearing upon their eternal interests. No subject, therefore, is more frequently inculcated in Scripture, or placed in a greater variety of lights, than the necessity of affliction to the people of God; and nowhere is it more emphatically set forth than in the early history of Israel, when the very people whom God had selected as the special objects of his favour, and towards whom that favour was to be largely manifested by temporal blessings, were, by the special arrangements of his providence, brought into a state of oppression unexampled in the history of any other people.

But other purposes were to be served by the oppression of Israel in Egypt, besides furnishing an illustration of the great principle that affliction must enter largely into God's dealings

with his people. None, I think, who have perused, with any care, the history of the children of Israel, from their redemption from the bondage of Egypt till their settlement in the land of Canaan, can fail to have seen in that history a very vivid representation of the great work of man's redemption,—the deliverance of the Church, the people of God, from a state of sin and misery,—their pilgrimage in this world of trial and suffering,—and their arrival at last at the land of rest and promise. Not only does the general outline of that history suggest the idea of such a resemblance, but none, except those who are familiar with its details, can conceive of the numerous instances in which the experience of the Israelites in temporal things presents such a striking representation of what the Scriptures describe as the experience of believers in spiritual things, as forces on the mind the idea that all the events in the history of the former were arranged and determined for the very purpose of illustrating the latter. And so the Scriptures testify. In the Epistle to the Hebrews, the apostle proceeds upon the principle, that the journeying of Israel towards the land of Canaan was a representation of the pilgrimage of believers through this world to the heavenly Canaan, the rest that remaineth for the people of God; and in other parts of the New Testament, we are expressly told that the events which befell Israel,—the chastisements with which they were visited, and the deliverances which were wrought on their behalf,—were intended for the instruction of the Church in all subsequent times. In the Epistle to the Corinthians, the apostle very distinctly declares that the manna which the people of Israel ate in the wilderness, and the water which was brought out of the rock for them to drink, were types of the spiritual meat and of the spiritual drink which are provided for the Church still, and which will continue to be provided till the consummation of all things. For, after alluding to these events in the history of Israel, and representing them as the means by which that people were made partakers of spiritual blessings, the apostle adds, "Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples," or types; "and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come."

And the experience of believers will be found to be in perfect accordance with all this. To those who are conversant with the

Scriptures, and who find that they are as dependent on the daily perusal of the Word of God as they are on their necessary food, the history of Israel during their journey from Egypt to the land of Canaan will never fail to be full of interest, being alike profitable for reproof and rich in consolation. For how often has a feeling of godly sorrow and childlike penitence been awakened in the heart of believers in perusing the history of Israel, and discovering in the unbelief, impatience, and rebellion of that people a faithful representation of their own heart and character under the trials and afflictions to which they have at times been exposed! How often have they been reconciled to the divine chastisements by dwelling on those with which Israel was visited, and discovering that such chastisements were not more necessary, and not more righteously and graciously inflicted, in the case of Israel than in their own! And what abundant consolation have they drawn from meditating on the gracious interpositions which Israel experienced, as so many recorded pledges of similar interpositions on their own behalf! How often has their confidence in the all-sufficiency of the Saviour, in the efficacy of his blood, and in the perfection of his atonement, gathered strength from the devout perusal of the institution of the passover, when the blood of the lamb formed the only protection of Israel from the wrath of the destroying angel! How frequently has their wounded spirit been soothed and refreshed, amidst the tumult of fears and doubts which conscious sin awakened, by dwelling on the simple story of the brazen serpent! And how oft have they felt as if they had conquered the last lingering fear which lurks in the bosom of believers,—the fear of dying, the dread of passing through the dark valley of the shadow of death,—by dwelling on the glorious spectacle of the ark of God standing in the middle of Jordan, till all, even the feeblest, of the house of Israel had passed over on dry ground!

And if the whole history of Israel, in their journeying through the wilderness, and their final settlement in Canaan, be thus declared in Scripture, and felt in the experience of believers, to be typical of the pilgrimage of God's people, and of the discipline by which they are made meet for their inheritance in the heavenly Canaan, we cannot regard the oppression of Israel in Egypt, the hard bondage whereby their lives were made bitter, otherwise than

as typical also,—as intended to set forth the bondage under which all men lie as sinners, till the moment that they are set free, and by faith in Christ are translated into the light and liberty of the sons of God. And it were easy to show that the state of misery so emphatically described in the passage before us, and illustrated by what is stated in the preceding chapter, is after all but a very faint representation of the miserable condition of men spiritually, as at once subject to the condemnation of God's law, and under bondage to the power of sin, the hardest and most merciless of all task-masters. But this, too, will be acknowledged, as in accordance with their experience, by all who have been delivered from that state, and who have found, through faith in the Redeemer, deliverance from condemnation, and enlargement from the tyranny of sin, the bondage of corruption. They will acknowledge, also, that the passage before us faithfully represents the way whereby they were so enlarged, when it says that "the children of Israel sighed by reason of the bondage, and they cried, and their cry came up unto God by reason of the bondage." The first step, in the divine procedure, towards the deliverance of sinners, is to make them sensible of their unhappiness, —to awaken them to a just apprehension of their guilt, and danger, and bondage,—to convince them of their sin and misery. And when so convinced, they will sigh by reason of their bondage, and they will cry, and their cry will come up unto God. It is, in fact, a cry dictated by His own Spirit, and will, therefore, be assuredly heard and answered; for when God has gracious purposes towards sinners, it is thus that he deals with them, even exciting them to ask the blessings which he has purposed to bestow. "And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: —and in that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness." It was thus that his gracious purpose of delivering Israel from Egypt, which seemed for a long period to be forgotten, was intimated; and it is thus that he still deals with men: for it is an established principle in the economy of grace, that whatever be the extent of blessings which he has purposed to bestow upon his people, he will for all these be inquired of at their hand to do it for them.

It appears, then, that the bondage of Israel in Egypt was designed to represent the condition of mankind as fallen and guilty creatures, in order to exhibit, in their deliverance and in their journeying to the land of Canaan, such a type or figurative illustration of the great plan of redemption, as might furnish to the Church, in all after-times, abundant matter for devout meditation,—matter "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." And were the people of Israel, then, it may be asked, subjected to all the rigour and cruel exactions of Egyptian bondage, merely that their example and their history might be profitable to the Church in after-times? I would reply, that even if it had been so, who would have had any right to complain? With regard to those of the people of Israel who were not truly penitent, they suffered only as they had sinned, nay, unspeakably less than their iniquities deserved; for in this life, no man has been dealt with after his sins, nor rewarded according to his iniquities. And with respect to true believers, the spiritual children of Abraham, would they have thought it hard or unreasonable that they were exposed even to the most cruel and unjust oppression on the part of their enemies, if thereby they were to be the means of ministering to the instruction, the reproof, and the consolation of the Church in all subsequent ages? Did not the assurance of his being a blessing, even a blessing to all the families of the earth, reconcile Abraham to his condition as a stranger and a sojourner in the land of promise? Did not the desire of benefiting the Church, strengthening the faith, and encouraging the hope of the people of God, occupy the mind of Jacob and of Joseph, even at the approach of that solemn event in which all concern for others might have been absorbed in concern for themselves, as about to enter on an unseen and eternal state? Did not the same spirit animate the saints and martyrs of all subsequent times, so that they were ready to do and willing to endure any thing by which they might advance the glory of God, and minister to the comfort, the reproof, or the instruction of the Church? And when the great day of reckoning has come,—when the secrets of all hearts shall have been disclosed,—and when the bearings of men's doings and sufferings on the condition of their fellow-men, whether for good or for evil, shall have been laid open,—will it not be a

subject of growing admiration and praise through eternity, to those of God's people who were most deeply afflicted and most severely tried, if it be found that their afflictions and trials were rendered the blessed means of strengthening the faith, and keeping alive the hope, and ministering to the consolation of those who are to be partakers with them of the inheritance of the saints in light? Christians, I fear, are not sufficiently alive to the consideration, that their afflictions and trials, independently of the advantage which they themselves may derive from them, may be blessed to others to an extent which they are little able to estimate; and that they think too little of the apostle's declaration, that "none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself."

But though I should hold this a satisfactory reply to the question, whether the Israelites were subjected to all the horrors of Egyptian bondage, merely or chiefly for the sake of the Church in after-times, I would observe, further, that their subjection to that bondage was most salutary to themselves, both fitted and designed to promote their best interests, even their spiritual well-being. It is evident, from various intimations in Scripture, that notwithstanding the marvellous display of the divine goodness in bringing them into Egypt, and there providing in such rich abundance for their comfort,—and notwithstanding the testimony which Jacob and Joseph left behind them to the faithfulness of the divine promises, and the certainty with which these promises would be fulfilled,—the Israelites had suffered grievously from their intercourse with the Egyptians,—that they had not only lost that dread and detestation of idolatry which it was alike their duty and their safety to cherish, but that they had gradually been drawn away from the worship of the true God, and that the faith of their fathers was in danger of being utterly forgotten and lost. It was in great mercy, therefore, that they were permitted to fall into divers afflictions, and made to feel that none but the God of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, could help them. But for these afflictions, they never could have been persuaded to leave Egypt at all. Even after all that they had endured, we find them once and again, in the course of their journeying through the wilderness, when overtaken by some unexpected trial, exclaiming with great bitterness of feeling towards Moses,

"Wherefore hast thou dealt thus with us, to carry us forth out of Egypt? Is not this the word that we did tell thee in Egypt, saying, Let us alone that we may serve the Egyptians? For it had been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness." Nay, even when they had reached the borders of Canaan, and were ready to take possession of the land, we find them saying, in the prospect of some difficulties that seemed to stand in their way, "Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt."

All this bears witness, that even the cruel bondage which they endured in the land of their captivity had not proved the effectual means of weaning their affections from the idolatries of that land; and we find, accordingly, that, besides all the severities of that bondage, they were subjected to the discipline of forty years' wandering in the wilderness, where all from twenty years old and upwards died. We may conclude, I think, that many of those who thus fell in the wilderness, though they were not permitted to enter the earthly Canaan, were, by means of the discipline which they underwent, brought into a state of penitence and faith, and finally became heirs of a better, even an heavenly inheritance. But one thing is clear, that severe as their sufferings had been, they suffered nothing beyond what was necessary for persuading them to seek a better portion than Egypt, for which they continued so long, in spite of all its horrors as a house of bondage, to cherish an infatuated attachment. And such will be the acknowledgment of all who have reaped the fruits of sanctified affliction. However complicated and severe their afflictions may have been, or however unnecessary they might think them at the time, they will sooner or later acknowledge, that had they been less numerous or less painful, their spiritual interests might have been in jeopardy,—that they were all required to wean their affections from the lying vanities by which they had once been deceived, and which they thought they had for ever abandoned,—that every new trial was most seasonably appointed to check the growth of some worldly feeling or affection, which had a tendency to draw them back into the captivity from which they had made their escape,—that nothing but a succession of worldly disappointments would have prevented them from seeking in present things more of their happiness than was consis-

tent with their growth in grace, and preparedness for a better portion,—and that if even through life they were constantly reminded, as Israel was in the wilderness, that they were but pilgrims and strangers, it was to eradicate their lingering attachment to that state of bondage, the bitterness of which they once felt, but to which they were still prone to return. The believer will say of the last as well as the first, even of the thousand afflictions to which he may be exposed, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted.—I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me."

XXII.

THE BURNING BUSH.

EXODUS III. 3-8.

THE great sight which Moses turned aside to see was nothing less than the symbol of the Divine Presence, as this passage expressly declares. Not only is it said that God called unto Moses out of the midst of the bush, but that he commanded him, saying, "Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground,"—an expression, which, taken in connection with what is elsewhere stated in Scripture, can only be understood as implying that God was present there in a very peculiar manner, just as he afterwards was in the most holy place in the tabernacle and temple,—in the cloud of glory,—which all, with the exception of the high priest once a-year, were forbidden, on pain of death, to approach or gaze upon. We are further told, that the Lord said unto him, "I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob:" and that "Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God." No language could declare more expressly than this does that Moses was in the presence of a Divine Person,—admitted to hear the voice of God, and to look on the symbol of his glory. It is, indeed, said in the second verse, that it was the Angel of the Lord that appeared unto Moses in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. But so far from being inconsistent with what is afterwards said, when it is declared that it was God who called to Moses out of the bush, this statement of its being the Angel of the Lord does in reality

convey most important and instructive information respecting the Person who did thus appear; plainly intimating that it was the second Person in the Godhead,—the Eternal Word,—who was afterwards made flesh, and dwelt among men; and they beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

Of the many titles which are given to Christ in the Holy Scriptures, there is none more frequently used, in one form of expression or another, than that of his being the Angel, the Messenger, the Sent of the Lord. When Jacob invoked the divine blessing on the sons of Joseph, it was in these words,—"God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk, the God which fed me all my life long unto this day, the Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads,"—words which do expressly give the name or title of Angel to God, and in such a connection as plainly shows that the Person intended was the Son, the Redeemer, the Second Person of the Godhead. In a subsequent part of this same book, we find the people of Israel, on their way from Egypt to Canaan, thus warned,—"Behold, I send an Angel before thee, to keep thee in the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared. Beware of him, and obey his voice; provoke him not; for he will not pardon your transgressions; for my name is in him." In the prophecies of Malachi, Christ is foretold, in language too plain to be misunderstood, under the same title, when it is said,—"The Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the Messenger of the Covenant, whom ye delight in; behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts." And in the New Testament, how frequently do we find our Lord representing himself under the character of the Angel or Messenger of the Lord,—as having been sent of God to reveal the divine character and counsels!

And by what name or title could Christ be more appropriately foretold before he came, or designated after he did appear? It was only in virtue of the covenant between the Father and him, that any communication of a gracious kind, any intimation of mercy, could have been made to our fallen race; and it was only through him, and for his sake, that God could ever have been known to us in any other character than that of the righteous Lawgiver and Judge, vindicating the honour and rectitude of his

law by inflicting its penalty upon transgressors. As the one only Mediator between God and sinners, he was from the beginning the channel of communication whereby every revelation of the divine will and character, and every intimation of the divine purposes concerning the salvation of sinners, has been conveyed to the children of men. And we find, accordingly, many instances recorded in Scripture, not only of communications being made to the Church of old by angels commissioned by him, but of his own personal manifestation to his servants, and that in such a way, and on such occasions, as very plainly to set forth the great work for the accomplishment of which he was one day to become incarnate, and to tabernacle for a season among men. And such was, in a peculiar manner, the occasion of his appearing, as recorded in the passage under consideration. He had come down to deliver his people out of the hand of the Egyptians,—a deliverance which furnishes the plainest and most instructive type of the great work of redemption which is to be found in the history of the Old Testament Church:—"I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows; and I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey."

Assuming, then, that the great sight which appeared to Moses was a manifestation of the Eternal Word himself, the manner of his appearance cannot fail to suggest to us his actual manifestation in the fulness of time, when he appeared to take away sin by the sacrifice of himself. The bush in the desert of Horeb was no unfit emblem of the human nature of Him who was afterwards foretold by the prophet under the figure of "a root out of a dry ground;" while the fire which burned, but did not consume it, afforded an equally striking representation of those inconceivable sufferings which he endured when he bore the penalty of his people's guilt, becoming a curse for them, that he might redeem them from the curse of the law,—suffering, the just for the unjust, that he might bring them unto God. There is not in nature a more expressive representation of intense suffering than fire; and no emblem is more frequently employed in

Scripture to set forth the terrible nature of the wrath of God,—the infliction of his righteous displeasure on sin. We find, accordingly, that the leading type whereby the faith of the Old Testament Church was directed to Christ was the burnt-offering,—a type which was familiar to Abraham, and which, after the establishment of the Mosaic economy, was exhibited daily, morning and evening, besides on many other special occasions. It will be remembered, too, that in the case of the institution of the Passover, very strict and special instructions were given that the lamb slain on that occasion was to be roasted with fire, and that if any part of it was not eaten, but remained until the morning, it was to be burned with fire. We cannot doubt that all these instructions were very significant; and as the sacrifice to which they referred did so plainly set forth the atoning sacrifice of the Redeemer, we can as little doubt that the burning with fire was intended to typify his sufferings,—that inconceivable agony which filled his soul with sore amazement, and under which he exclaimed, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" And remembering these things, we can hardly read this passage, I think, without having our thoughts directed to the same solemn and most salutary subject of meditation, even Christ's endurance of that wrath, which, but for his interposition, must have been to us a consuming fire.

We say salutary subject of meditation; for where are we to see the true character of sin, and the punishment which must be awarded to it by a holy and righteous God, if it is not in the sufferings and death of the Lord Jesus? Or how is a sense of its deformity and hatefulness to be awakened and kept alive in our minds, if we are not frequently conversant with what the Scriptures testify concerning these sufferings? We are but too prone to regard sin, in many of its less revolting forms, as a light and trivial thing; and, familiar as we are with it every day, we stand greatly in need of having our minds frequently occupied with what is fitted to place its character and consequences in their true light, in order to counteract our natural tendency to regard it with indifference. And no subject is better fitted to exercise such a salutary influence on our heart than that of our Lord's sufferings, nor is there any one that is more frequently urged upon our attention in Scripture. From begin-

ning to end of the Old Testament, we find it presented to us in predictions, promises, and types, which, though but imperfectly understood by those to whom they were first communicated, do now exhibit Christ and him crucified as the grand subject of the whole revelation of God; and in the New Testament, when these sufferings were actually undergone, they are urged on the attention of Christians, as furnishing at once the foundation of the believer's hope, and the motive of the believer's obedience. And one of the privileges which the New Testament Church enjoy over believers under the old economy, is the greater clearness with which they now see innumerable intimations of a suffering Saviour, both predicted in prophecy and prefigured in type, in consequence of which their motives to believing and cheerful obedience are greatly multiplied and strengthened. And the remark is peculiarly applicable to the subject before us. Whatever might be the extent to which Moses foresaw, in the great sight which he turned aside to see, the mediatorial work of the Lord Jesus Christ, we cannot read what was addressed to him without having our thoughts irresistibly turned to that work. "I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and I am come down to deliver them," is language which might have been employed literally to describe the great purpose for which the same glorious Person was afterwards "manifested in the flesh," when he came "to seek and to save that which was lost,"—"to preach good tidings unto the meek, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison-door to them that were bound." It was, without doubt, a great and glorious object for which the Lord appeared in Horeb, when he came down to deliver Israel from bondage. But still it was only a type of his future manifestation, when for a season he did in very deed dwell with men on the earth,—and when, in the accomplishment of his mighty work, he endured what was but figuratively set forth in the burning bush of Horeb.

But if believers are thus impressively reminded by the statement in this passage of what is due to sin, and of what was necessary for its atonement, they are reminded also of the precious truth that the atonement has been fully made,—that the penalty of sin was inflicted to the uttermost, and endured until it was exhausted,

—and that in the pardon of the guilty, the divine law has not only been vindicated, but magnified and made honourable. Under the inconceivable burden which Christ sustained, when the Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all, his soul was filled with sore amazement, and he "offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears, unto him that was able to save him from death." But he did endure, till he could say, "It is finished;" and we have at once an emblem of his condition under the intense agony which he endured, and a prediction of the glorious issue of his undertaking, in the great sight that appeared to Moses,—"The bush burned with fire, but the bush was not consumed."

But there is another subject which is naturally, I may say irresistibly, suggested by the remarkable appearance here recorded,—I mean the sufferings of the Church of Christ,—the people whom he died to redeem. Even to Moses himself, the great sight which he turned aside to see could hardly fail to suggest the condition of his afflicted brethren in Egypt, as well as the remarkable interpositions which they had experienced in the midst of oppression unexampled in the history of the world. We find that condition elsewhere in Scripture repeatedly set forth under the figure of the iron furnace; and we have only to read the very brief history contained in the two preceding chapters of this book, to see how appropriately it was so described, and how clearly it was owing to the immediate interposition of divine power that they were not consumed in that furnace. It is obvious from that history, that nothing but self-interest prevented the king of Egypt from taking direct measures for utterly extirpating the Israelites out of his land, and that by the most violent means, even by blotting out their name from under heaven. He found it to be for his advantage to enjoy their labour as his slaves,—to turn them to good account, in the way of ministering to the gratification of his own and his people's vanity; and hence his obstinate unwillingness to let them go. But in order to prevent them increasing beyond what he thought necessary and safe,—to prevent them, in fact, from becoming dangerous, in the event of a foreign enemy invading the land,—he issued a decree that every male child of the Hebrews should be cast into the river,—a decree which plainly showed that he who issued it

would as readily have issued another for the total extirpation of the whole Hebrew race, if he had felt it to be for his interest to do so. But his avarice, or his ambition, or some other motive, was made to lay a restraint on his cruelty,—nay, his wrath was made to praise the God of the Hebrews, and the remainder of his wrath was so restrained, that, in spite of all his skill and his power, Israel grew, and multiplied, and became a great nation in Egypt,—and that, too, under the pressure of a tyranny which was sufficient to have crushed them into utter despondency. But in the midst of this fierce and fiery persecution, the Angel of the Covenant was with them; therefore, though the bush burned, it was not consumed.

The miraculous sight which appeared to Moses could hardly fail to suggest to him all this,—he himself being a living example of that marvellous providence by which the murderous purpose of the king of Egypt had not only been frustrated, but made the means of preparing an instrument for the overthrow of his tyrannical power, and the deliverance of his oppressed and enslaved prisoners. Nor can it be doubted that it was designed to set forth the presence of Christ with his suffering Church and people, not only in Egypt during the sojourning of Israel there, but in all other times and countries. Its primary object, as I think, was to typify the sufferings of Christ himself, as I have already had occasion to state and illustrate. But such is the intimate relation, the oneness, of Christ and his people, that their sufferings are represented as his; and whatever, therefore, was employed to foretell or prefigure the one may be regarded as a prediction also and a type of the other. It is said, in regard to the sufferings of the Old Testament Church, "In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them;" —"He found Israel in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; he led him about, he instructed him; he kept him as the apple of his eye;"—"For thus saith the Lord of hosts, After the glory hath he sent me unto the nations which spoiled you: for he that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye." And in the New Testament, the sufferings of Christ's people are everywhere identified with the sufferings of Christ himself. "If we are children," says the apostle, "then we are heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ: if so be that we suffer with

him, that we may be also glorified together." The same apostle declares, that he counted all things but loss, and had actually "suffered the loss of all things," that he might know Christ, "and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death." And he expresses the same truth still more strongly in his Epistle to the Colossians, when he says, "I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the Church."

The great sight, then, which Moses saw, did very plainly and expressively intimate that the Church might lay her account with suffering,—and such suffering, too, as would threaten her utter destruction. And so it has been in manifold instances, subsequently to the period here spoken of, both under the Old Testament dispensation, and since the coming of Christ. I might enumerate various occasions on which the Church,—the people of God in their collective capacity,—were brought into the furnace of affliction, exposed to persecution in every form which the cruel ingenuity of man could devise, and so despised, oppressed, and broken, as, humanly speaking, to leave no hope of even a remnant being preserved. It might easily be shown, too, that these persecutions, though ostensibly justified on different grounds, and ascribed to something in the character and conduct of believers which required that they should be so dealt with, may be all traced to the enmity of the carnal mind against God,—the principle of which our Lord warned his disciples, when he said to them, "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his Lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also." And with this recorded warning before us, we have good reason to wonder, not that the persecutions of the Church have been so many, but that they have been so few,—and that if there have frequently been long intervals during which persecution, in the strict sense of the term, was unknown, there is some room for the inquiry, whether the cause of such respites has not been, that the

Church did at such seasons conform too closely to the sentiments and practices of the world,—so closely as not to exhibit prominently that purity, and holiness, and spirituality, which, when palpably manifested, will never fail to excite the world's enmity. One truth the history of the Church has established, namely, that times of persecution have been times of purity; and they have been numerous enough, moreover, to verify the prediction in the verses under consideration, that as the Church then was, so she might and would again be, as a bush that burned.

But the great sight which Moses turned aside to see was not merely a typical prediction of what the Church might expect to meet with, and would assuredly suffer. It intimated also, in a way the clearest and most emphatic, that however fierce might be the fiery trials which awaited her, and however certain and unavoidable her utter destruction might at times appear to be, yet the furnace should never have power to destroy her. "The bush burned, but was not consumed." Such had been the case with Israel in Egypt,—the house of bondage,—the iron furnace; and so it has ever been, and ever will be. The promise, indeed, which was figuratively or typically given in the burning bush on Horeb, was frequently afterwards repeated in express words, and has in all ages ministered to the consolation of the people of God in seasons of trial. Nor was it merely the promise or assurance that against the Church of Christ the gates of hell should never prevail, precious and animating as that promise is. The sight which appeared to Moses intimated also why it was that the Church never could be destroyed,—even because Christ himself dwells in the midst of her,—not merely as the omnipresent God, who exercises an immediate control over all his creatures and all their actions; but as her living Head, imparting to her life, and light, and strength, and accommodating the communications of his grace to her necessities. And what was thus typically exhibited to Moses was afterwards, like the other predictions involved in that great sight, most expressly promised, and verified, moreover, by the actual manifestations of Christ's presence with his people, or on their behalf, in seasons of extremity. "God is our refuge and strength," says the Psalmist, "a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be

carried into the midst of the sea; though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High. God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved: God shall help her, and that right early."

In the writings of the prophets, we find many glorious things spoken of Zion, as the permanent dwelling-place of the Lord of glory,—the place where God delights to dwell, which he had chosen as his rest for ever, and on which Messiah was set King, where he is to reign till he shall receive the heathen for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession;—all which statements plainly intimate that the Church, —the whole body of true believers in their collective capacity,— are meant to be set forth by the title of Zion; and that the glory of Zion is the presence of her King in the midst of her. And to render this presence of Christ with his people still more palpable, and to give the Church the strongest assurance of the reality of that presence, we read of his actual manifestation for the deliverance of his servants in such circumstances as to furnish a striking commentary on the passage under consideration; for when the three children of the captivity were, by the command of the king of Babylon, cast into the burning fiery furnace, and fell down bound therein, apparently beyond all hope of escape or deliverance, "Nebuchadnezzar the king," we are told, "was astonied, and rose up in haste, and said unto his counsellors, Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? and, lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God." All these, and many other Old Testament intimations which might be quoted of Christ's presence with his Church, are confirmed by our Lord's own assurance to his disciples when he said, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." This promise, of course, refers to all times and all circumstances; so that in every condition, whether prosperous or adverse, the people of God, if living in the exercise of faith, and in a course of holy obedience, may reckon on Christ being in the midst of them, in a manner as peculiar as the Divine Presence was wont to be in the midst of Israel of old.

But the great sight described in this passage,—the bush that burned, but was not consumed,—does especially assure the Church of the gracious presence of her living Head in seasons of trial. And many are the instances in which this assurance has been amply verified. For what is the history of the progress and establishment of Christ's kingdom in the world, but a record of his marvellous interpositions on behalf of his people?—not always, indeed, to save them from persecution, or deliver them from the hand of the oppressor,—but, what did far more clearly demonstrate the reality of His presence with them, even to inspire them with such firmness and fortitude as enabled them to endure without shrinking the utmost that human cruelty could devise, and made their oppressors feel that they were contending with an unseen power which could not be subdued, and waging war with a cause which gathered strength from apparent defeat, —rising into renovated vigour when apparently on the point of being for ever put down. "The bush burned, but was not consumed."

We may thus find, in the past history of the Church, illustrations in abundance of the great truth which was symbolically, but very expressively set forth, in the sight which appeared to Moses; and it cannot be doubted that her future history will in like manner continue to bear testimony to the same truth. Whatever may be the nature and extent of the opposition which the Gospel is yet destined to encounter on the part of an ungodly world,—whatever may be the form which that opposition may assume,—whether it be the prevalence of error and infidelity, to such an extent as to threaten the utter extinction of the truth, or whether it be a more palpable manifestation of hostility in direct persecution,—however fierce and formidable that opposition may be; the Church, the body of Christ, united by faith to her living and life-giving Head, will successfully combat and ultimately triumph over it all, inasmuch as He that is for her is greater far than all that can be against her.

But the question here occurs,—and it is a momentous question to every one,—Are we individually so united to Christ? Unless we are so, it will avail us nothing to know, and professedly to believe, and even to feel something like satisfaction in believing, that against the Church of Christ the gates of hell shall never

prevail. If we belong to that Church only in name and by profession, we have no personal interest in the blessings which she now enjoys, nor in the triumphs which she is yet, through the Captain of her salvation, to achieve. We cannot enjoy the presence of her living Head unless he is in our own souls,—Christ formed in us the hope of glory. That presence is not like the Shekinah, or cloud of glory, of old, which dwelt in the midst of Israel, but dwelt apart from every individual, though in a place to which every individual might look. If Christ is now present with his Church, it is not with the Church generally, but with each believer personally. He does not animate and communicate spiritual blessings to his body as a whole, but to each individual member thereof; and no outward relation, therefore, in which we may stand to the Church, will make us partakers of these blessings, unless Christ be dwelling in our hearts by faith. If, indeed, he sends his Church a season of outward peace, and what may be called prosperity, when none are exposed to trial or tribulation on account of the profession which they make or the principles which they avow, we may enjoy, like others, all the comfort and security of such a season; and so long as this state of things continues, we may have no difficulty in persuading ourselves that we are indeed Christians, and are participating in all the blessings and privileges which the Gospel was ever designed to convey. But if we are not partakers of something better, all this will avail us nothing when the day of trial comes. The support which is promised to the Church under that trial, and which will assuredly be forthcoming, is such as we can have no lot or portion in, unless it be merely of an external kind, the removal of the trial itself; for it will be found, in respect to the consolation, and peace, and inward support whereby the people of God are at such seasons sustained, that we are altogether strangers thereto, there being in reality no established communication between our souls and that inexhaustible Source of all grace and strength, through which that consolation may flow in upon and refresh us. Should the trial, then, prove a severe, or, as the Scriptures express it, a "fiery" one, what could be expected but that our profession should be thereby consumed, —that we should be as glad to be regarded as having no concern or brotherhood with Christ's persecuted Church, as ever we

were to enjoy the respectability which attaches to a Christian profession in times like our own, when it is found that a man's connection with some church or another is essential to his succeeding in his worldly avocations?

But such public and general calamities as have been referred to are not necessary to bring to a test and to disclose the true character of those who have a mere profession, a name to live while they are dead. The people of God may be, and, I believe, generally are tried, and very severely too, even during those seasons when the Church at large is suffering no persecution; and the great sight which Moses saw is just as applicable to individual believers as it is to his whole body, the Church, in her collective capacity. In various ways they are brought into the furnace. By personal and family affliction,—by reverses in their worldly circumstances,—by the misconduct of those who are dear to them as their own souls,—by the assaults of their great spiritual adversary, suggesting to their troubled minds suspicious and unworthy thoughts of their heavenly Father's dealings with them,—and by the accusations of their own conscience, which, in a season of darkness and unbelief, lower over them like a cloud full only of wrath and judgment, individual believers may be, and frequently are, tried as severely as those were who had no other alternative but to deny Christ or to suffer martyrdom.

The bush, therefore, may burn, though outwardly there may be no intimation that it is on fire; and what could mere nominal professors do, or whither could they betake themselves for shelter, in such circumstances? They must be destitute of all true consolation,—bereft of all solid hope. The refuges in which they really trusted for all their enjoyment were but refuges of lies,—and they are burned up and consumed. They have not, as true believers have, a stronghold to which they can flee,—an hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest. They have never so known Christ as to be assured in their own experience, that to them who are united to him by a living faith, he is as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land. It is not, therefore, in the prospect of public and general calamity alone that it is needful for us to make sure of our personal interest in Christ, as our only security in the midst

of tribulation. There are trials of a personal and private kind,—so private as that the world perhaps never knew or took notice of them,—under which we stand as much in need of the presence and sustaining power of the great living Head of the Church, as ever did the martyr at the moment he was consigned to the flames; and multitudes, who have lived and died in the most peaceful times, have had as unequivocal proofs of Christ's presence with them, sustaining their fainting spirits, ministering strength to them in the midst of their weakness, and enabling them patiently to endure, as ever the persecuted saints themselves had; so that, humble and obscure as their condition might be, and unknown or unnoticed by the world as their trials were, there was enough in their personal history and experience to illustrate the meaning and to verify the truth of what was set forth in the great sight which appeared to Moses. And when, in their glorified state, they call to mind their own frailty and helplessness during their sojourn in this wilderness of sin and suffering, and reflect on the many and severe trials through which they passed, but which, though very formidable to anticipate and very painful to endure, did contribute largely towards their growth in grace and their preparedness for glory,—it will ever be to them a subject of growing admiration, and gratitude, and praise, that though troubled on every side, yet they were not distressed; though perplexed, they were not in despair,—that the fiery trial, which at times threatened to devour, served only to purify them,—that though the bush burned, it was not consumed.

XXIII.

THE ROD OF GOD.

EXODUS IV. 17.

We find it recorded in the preceding chapter, that the Lord spake unto Moses out of the midst of the burning bush, and said, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows; and I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey." We can easily conceive with what emotions of awe, admiration, and gratitude, Moses would receive such a communication. Feeling that he was in the very presence of God, hearing his voice, and looking on the visible symbol of his glory, he would at once conclude, not only that the deliverance of his oppressed brethren was infallibly certain and very near, but that it would be brought about by such a glorious display of the divine sovereignty and perfections as would require nothing of man's feeble agency. "I am come down to deliver my people," was a declaration,—coming as it did from such a manifestation of the divine presence as Moses was afraid to look upon,—which could hardly fail to awaken in his mind the sentiment which we find him expressing on a future occasion, that Israel would have nothing to do but to "stand still and see the salvation of the Lord." And what, then, must have been his amazement, when, after declaring that he had seen the afflic-

tion, and heard the cry, and knew the sorrows of his people, and had come down to deliver them,—and after again assuring Moses that the cry of Israel had come unto him, and that he had seen their oppression,—the Lord added, "Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt!" The proposal could hardly fail to awaken in his mind the recollection of his former attempt to interpose on behalf of his brethren, when he actually rescued one of their number from grievous oppression, and when he cherished the hope that he might be the means either of delivering all of them, or, at least, of mitigating their afflictions.

But the recollection would, in the first instance, serve only to reprove and humble him; for we may well believe that he could not look back on that attempt without feeling either as if he had acted rashly and with presumption, or as if he had faithlessly relinquished an undertaking in which he ought to have perilled his life. At all events, his former failure must have greatly aggravated his perplexity, on receiving the command to go and bring Israel out of Egypt. When he first interposed on behalf of his brethren, he had some grounds for reckoning on their confidence and co-operation. He must have been known to them as having been educated in the court of Pharaoh, "learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, being mighty in words and in deeds," and possessing, moreover, influence and power as the reputed son of Pharaoh's daughter; while his generosity in thinking of their affliction in the midst of all his own prosperity and worldly greatness, and in going forth into the midst of them for the avowed purpose of helping or delivering them, might have been expected at least to awaken their gratitude. And if in such circumstances they rudely spurned his interference, saying, "Who made thee a prince and a judge over us?" what was he to expect on returning to them after forty years' absence in the humble and obscure situation of a shepherd in Midian? We cannot wonder, then, if he was overwhelmed with amazement by the command, "Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt,"—coming, as that command did, immediately after the announce-

ment, "I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob; and I am come down to deliver my people." And that he was filled with astonishment and perplexity on receiving that unexpected command is evident from his very simple and natural, but emphatic reply, when he said unto God, "Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?"

This reply of Moses was the occasion of a very gracious manifestation of the divine condescension; for God said unto him, "Certainly I will be with thee; and this shall be a token unto thee, that I have sent thee: When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain." I need hardly remark, that this could not be a pledge, or token, or security for the success of Moses in bringing Israel out of Egypt, inasmuch as his serving God in Horeb was not to take place till after Israel had been delivered. But it was such a token as was befitting the Divine Majesty to give, and most becoming a dependent creature to accept of and confide in; for it was a renewal of the promise, "Certainly I will be with thee,"—a promise which was itself worthy of the entire confidence of Moses,—and it was the addition of another and a more specific promise still, that God would assuredly bring Moses, and the whole congregation of Israel, to the very place where Moses then stood, and that there they should offer the homage of their gratitude to the God of their salvation. Such a repetition of a promise by the God of truth might well be denominated a token; for who of his intelligent creatures has any right to ask or to expect any confirmation of his simple word, "I will be with thee?" But it was to be a token or pledge, in the literal sense of the word, of unspeakable value to Moses at a future period; for when he afterwards found himself encamped by Mount Horeb, surrounded with the thousands of Israel,—when he was on that mount forty days and forty nights with God, admitted to nearer fellowship with him than had ever been vouchsafed to man before,—when he there received the law, written on tables of stone by the finger of God himself, and was instructed by an audible voice in all that pertained to the government of Israel as a people and a Church,—and when he

had there erected, in all its magnificence and splendour, the tabernacle in which dwelt the visible symbol of the divine presence,—how marvellous and full of meaning must the promise have then appeared to him, "When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain!" and how largely must it have contributed to his consolation and encouragement during the succeeding eight-and-thirty years of weary wandering in the wilderness, and of bitter suffering from the unbelief and distrust of a rebellious and unreasonable people!

But this was not the full extent of the divine condescension manifested to Moses. Still feeling his utter inadequacy for the undertaking on which he was required to enter, "he said unto God, Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say unto me, What is his name? what shall I say unto them?" To this question God was pleased to reply by assuming that fearful and glorious name whereby he declared himself to be the self-existent, eternal, and unchangeable God, the everlasting "I AM." "God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM:" "Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you." And while God did thus assert his self-existence and sovereignty by a name which can belong only to him, he proclaimed it also as his name for ever, and his memorial unto all generations, "the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob," and then proceeded to warn Moses that he was not to be discouraged because he did not at once succeed in his mission,—that the king of Egypt would assuredly not let them go, no, not by a mighty hand,—that it would only be after many signs and wonders had been wrought, and many plagues had been inflicted, that they should be permitted to depart,—but that then they should not go empty, inasmuch as the wealth of Egypt would be pressed upon them whereby to purchase their departure. Still Moses was distrustful, and unwilling to undertake so mighty an enterprise, even with the assurance that Jehovah, the self-existent God, was to be with him; and in excuse for his own unbelief he pled the unbelief of his brethren. "Behold," said he, "they will not believe me, nor hearken unto my voice: for they will say, The

Lord hath not appeared unto thee." To remove this difficulty and ground of doubt, God wrought at the instant four miracles, to be related or repeated to the people of Israel, with the assurance that another should be wrought in their presence, if they refused to believe and acknowledge the former. But Moses still remained unbelieving, and in justification of his unwillingness to go, he pled, saying, "O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since thou hast spoken unto thy servant: but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue." To this, too, God was graciously pleased to reply with much forbearance and long-suffering, though in terms which conveyed reproof, saying, "Who hath made man's mouth? or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? have not I the Lord? Now therefore go, and I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say."

Moses had no further excuse to plead; but his distrust and unbelief were not therefore removed. Unwilling to undertake the work assigned to him, he was ingenious in finding out reasons for declining it; and when all these successively failed, the true state of his heart was at last disclosed, showing that under the appearance of diffidence in himself, he was in reality cherishing distrust in God. "He said, O my Lord, send, I pray thee, by the hand of him whom thou wilt send." Then it was that the anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses, though still mingled with marvellous compassion and tenderness; for while he sharply rebuked his unbelief and disobedience, he graciously promised him the aid and co-operation of Aaron, and renewing his command with a power and authority which could be neither gainsaid nor resisted, he dismissed him with the striking words, "Thou shalt take this rod in thine hand, wherewith thou shalt do signs."

The unwillingness which Moses manifested to undertake the mission to which he was appointed by immediate communication from God, stands strikingly contrasted with his former readiness to interpose on behalf of his brethren, while yet he had no such clear or express warrant for so interposing; and as his forwardness in the one case might partake somewhat of self-confidence, so his backwardness in the other was assuredly mingled with much distrust and unbelief. And at first sight it may

perhaps appear that in his case doubts and objections were peculiarly unreasonable, inasmuch as he received a direct command from God, accompanied with an express promise, frequently repeated, that his mission would ultimately be successful. But if we take into account the extraordinary nature of that mission, the circumstances and the manner in which Moses was appointed to it, and the recollections which could not fail to be called up in his mind by the unexpected command,—we shall see nothing in his slowness of heart to believe, and in his backwardness to obey that command, but what, I suspect, is every day to be found in others. For how often have Christians to struggle with a disinclination towards painful and self-denying duties, though as plainly enjoined in the Word of God as the command laid upon Moses! How ready are they to plead, if not formally and in so many words, at least in substance, the same sort of excuses which he pled! And in how many instances have they actually reconciled themselves to the neglect or the delay of such duties on grounds which in the case of another they would readily see could not justify that neglect! That man, indeed, must know little of his own heart, and be little accustomed to take a serious review of his past life, who is not reminded by the conduct of Moses of many instances of distrust and disobedience on his own part, and who does not feel rebuked by the narrative of the marvellous communing on Mount Horeb.

But if the example of Moses be profitable in the way of reproof, it is not less salutary for instruction and encouragement. His objections, though numerous and very pertinaciously urged, were at length removed; and, as we have every reason to believe, he undertook willingly and with confidence what at first he had contemplated with utter dismay as altogether a hopeless undertaking. And his compliance is rendered still more striking by the instruction conveyed in the words, "Thou shalt take this rod in thine hand, wherewith thou shalt do signs." A preparation like this, for so mighty an enterprise as that of delivering an enslaved people, was assuredly to all appearance the most inadequate and the least fitted to inspire Moses with any confidence as to the issue of his undertaking. But he had by this time learned, what before he did but very imperfectly understand, a great deal of the principles of the divine procedure in

carrying into effect his gracious purposes for the manifestation of his own glory and the good of his people. When God first announced to him the purpose of his glorious appearing, saying, "I am come down to deliver my people," Moses would at once conclude that by some miraculous and irresistible act of power, the children of Israel were to be set at liberty, in such a way as to show that the hand of God alone had done it. But during the interview to which he had been graciously admitted, he had been taught to understand, not only that God is pleased to appoint means for accomplishing his purposes both of judgment and of mercy, but that in doing so he displays the glory of his own character, and promotes the well-being of his people, as these objects could not otherwise be accomplished. He had been made to perceive that the very inadequacy of the means employed, as compared with the object to be attained, was that which was most clearly to demonstrate the power of God in that accomplishment. He began to see that in his own personal dealings with Pharaoh, as well as with his brethren the people of Israel, the character and moral attributes of God, and the great principles of his government, would be presented to both as they could not have been in any other way, and that lessons of the greatest moment might be taught through the instrumentality of his interference which could not otherwise have been taught; while his very feebleness, his apparently utter insufficiency for the work assigned to him, would only render these lessons the more solemn and impressive. Thus enlightened, and thus convinced that he had received a divine commission, he hesitated no longer. And, assuredly, it is a sublime subject to contemplate the humble and obscure shepherd, with his rod only in his hand, issuing from the wilderness of Midian, and proceeding with unfaltering confidence to undertake an enterprise of such magnitude,—an enterprise from which he had, forty years before, shrunk on the first show of opposition, though at that time he could reckon on being known to his brethren as the reputed son of Pharaoh's daughter, learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and mighty in word and in deed.

Few, perhaps, ever had in their own experience a more striking illustration than Moses had of the truth which was recorded, in a general form, by an inspired writer, many generations after

the time of Moses, and in relation to an event somewhat similar to that in which he was concerned, even the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the temple after the Babylonish captivity: "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." Moses had attempted to turn his power and his might to account in the way of delivering his brethren; but he utterly failed, and abandoned his purpose almost as soon as he had begun to carry it into effect. But now, without might and without power, in so far as personal influence and outward means were concerned, we find him embarking in the same undertaking, resting on the simple word and promise of God, "Certainly I will be with thee." And such is the principle on which God has in all past ages acted on behalf of his Church, and still continues to act. No careful reader of the past history of the world, and no devout observer of what has taken place in his own day, can have failed to see that events the most important to the world at large, and especially to the interests of Christ's kingdom, have been brought about by means not only inadequate in themselves to produce such results, but means which were never intended by man to produce them, and which grievously disappointed those who looked forward to a very different issue of their schemes. In fact, there is no man living who has not in his own experience proofs and illustrations of the great truth that the Lord God omnipotent reigneth,—that he confoundeth the wisdom of the wise, and bringeth to nothing the understanding of the prudent,—and that though the lot is cast into the lap, the disposal thereof is altogether of the Lord;—for who is there that has not on some occasions been more indebted for the advancement of his worldly interest to some occurrence which he is disposed to call accidental or fortunate, than to all the skill and labour which he had expended with the view of bringing about the wished-for result?

But the most glorious illustration of the principle unfolded to Moses, and so strikingly exemplified in his own personal experience, is to be found in the means which have been employed for the extension and establishment of Christ's kingdom. And in looking back upon these, we cannot avoid having our attention arrested by the marvellous fact, that the propagation of the Gospel, even at the first, was committed to eleven illiterate and obscure individuals, whose attainments could only have excited the ridi-

cule, the contempt, the haughty sneer, and scorn of all who thought themselves, and were esteemed by others, the learned, the refined, and the knowing ones of the world. If the humble shepherd of eighty, going down from the desert of Midian, for the professed purpose of extorting from the mightiest monarch of the world the liberation of a whole nation of slaves, might have been regarded as the wildest and most extravagant enterprise on which a man had ever entered,—how much more extravagant might human wisdom have pronounced the undertaking of the apostles, when, with the simple doctrine of Christ crucified in their mouth, the perception of its glorious consequences in their understanding, and the faith of it in their heart, they went forth to convince apostate Jews and idolatrous Gentiles that there was no salvation for them but through the blood of Jesus, the despised, the persecuted, the crucified Nazarene! Verily, the rod of Moses was a mighty sceptre compared with the armour with which the apostles were externally furnished; inasmuch as with that rod he did indeed do signs,—signs which did not convince Pharaoh, but which crushed him, and which compelled him, under the influence of terror, to let Israel go. But the apostles wielded no such power. They did, it is true, work miracles in abundance. But these miracles were not wrought for the purpose of effecting a mere temporal object. They were not designed to operate upon a community, as in the case of Pharaoh and his people, to persuade or terrify them into the adoption of any particular course of mere outward acting. They were so many testimonies graciously vouchsafed to the divine authority of the apostles, most precious to believers for the confirmation of their faith, and most terrible to unbelievers as an aggravation of their guilt, and consequently of their condemnation. But they never did, and never could, of themselves convert men, so as to persuade them to believe in Christ. For the accomplishment of this, the great end of the ministry of the apostles, they trusted, not to the miracles which they wrought, but to the truths which they preached; and the light in which this instrument, whereby they were to achieve such conquests over the hearts and consciences of men, was viewed by the world at large, is very expressively described by the apostle when he tells us that the doctrine of Christ crucified,—the rod which was put

into their hand wherewith to set men free from the bondage of sin and Satan,—was "to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness." In so far, then, as the apostles did succeed in wielding this instrument, they had an illustration, not so striking outwardly, perhaps, as that of Moses, but in reality more so, of the great truth, "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts,"—or, as the apostle himself has expressed it under a different figure, "We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us."

I have remarked, that though the power of God was more strikingly manifested as to outward appearance in the mission of Moses than in that of the apostles, yet it was in reality more gloriously displayed in the latter. Much was, no doubt, done by Moses, which was both fitted and designed to convict, and also to convince, Pharaoh and his people, of the guilt and folly of resisting the God of Israel, and trusting to the false gods of their idolatrous worship; but the only effect, so far as we can judge, of all that he did, was to overwhelm them with terror, and thereby to extort from them the liberation of Israel. But the effects of the power which the apostles wielded were of a far higher kind. They gained victories over the hearts and consciences of men, turning them from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they might receive the forgiveness of sin, and an inheritance among them that are sanctified through faith that is in Christ Jesus. The doctrine of Christ crucified, though "to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness,"—and though to all, in their natural state, a very contemptible, or rather a very offensive thing,—was nevertheless, to them who were called, "the power of God, and the wisdom of God." And so it has been, and will be to the end. The simple gospel, the doctrine of salvation by the blood of Christ, is preeminently "the rod of his strength,"—that by which he has gotten him the victory,—and of which the rod of Moses was but the type. With this it is that he makes his people willing in the day of his power,—subduing them unto himself,—bringing down every high thing that would exalt itself above the knowledge of him,—driving them from one refuge of lies, one ground of false hope, after another, and bringing them gladly to take refuge in

his own righteousness, as the only resting-place for their distracted spirits,—the only ground on which they can find repose from the fears, and doubts, and anxious forebodings of conscience when it has been once awakened, and when they cannot get rid of the very simple, but very solemn and soul-searching question, What is to become of me when I die? To this all-important question the Gospel answers, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die." And the divine generosity of this invitation, when seen and felt by those who had long been insensible to or had made light of it, breaks down their proud and self-righteous spirit, and awakens in their hearts such a sense of obligation and such a feeling of gratitude as call forth obedience to the will of Christ, not only in an unspeakably higher degree, but of a totally different kind from any thing which the dread of punishment, or the hope of purchasing exemption from it, could ever have extorted.

It is thus that Christ by the rod of his strength is still subduing a people unto himself; and in every instance in which a sinner is thus converted unto God, though such an event may attract little of the world's attention, or if it does, may only call forth ridicule and reproach, yet in every case of conversion to God, there is erected a monument which shall be eternal, to the glory of God's grace, and on which angels will look with adoring wonder. But it is not in the case of the conversion of sinners alone that the rod of Christ's strength,—the preaching of the Gospel,—will be found to be the mighty power of God. It will prove to be so even in the case of the careless and impenitent. I know they will not believe me when I say so; but it is truth, God's truth, nevertheless,—for the Holy Ghost has recorded this solemn, this awfully solemn declaration, that the preaching of the gospel is either the savour of life unto life, or the savour of death unto death. It may be very easy for the thoughtless,—the giddy, the gay votaries of worldly pleasure,—and the avowedly infidel, to make light of all this. The rod of Christ's strength may be placed at times in very feeble hands,—the hands of those who are disposed and who have good reason to say with

Moses, "O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since thou hast spoken unto thy servant; but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue;" and the vain, the proud, and the worldly-minded, may find it easy to transfer some portion of the contempt which they feel for the man who proclaims the truth to the truth itself which he declares. But it is truth still. Its power suffers nothing either by the weakness of the believer on the one hand, or by the perverseness of unbelievers on the other. It is the truth by which they shall be judged. None, therefore, can hear it without being either the better or the worse. The proclamation of the Gospel,—the simple truth as it is in Jesus,—is the rod of his strength, that with which he will do signs; and though these signs may attract but little notice now, they will be exhibited on that day when He comes to judge the world in righteousness, when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed, and when every man shall receive according to his works, whether they have been good, or whether they have been evil.

XXIV.

THE PASSOVER.

EXODUS XII. 26, 27.

WHEN Moses received his commission to go down into Egypt to bring up the children of Israel from thence, God said to him, "Thou shalt take this rod in thine hand, wherewith thou shalt do signs;" and Moses accordingly departed from the land of Midian, where he had resided for forty years in the capacity of shepherd to his father-in-law, and returned to the land of Egypt, "and took the rod of God in his hand." On arriving there, his first work was, in conjunction with his brother Aaron, to gather together all the elders of the children of Israel, and to speak to them all the words which the Lord had spoken unto them, and to do the signs in the sight of the people. "And the people believed: and when they heard that the Lord had visited the children of Israel, and that he had looked upon their affliction, then they bowed their heads and worshipped." So far the prospects of Moses, as to the success of his mission, were fair and promising. But he met with a very different reception on the part of Pharaoh; for when he went in along with Aaron, "and told Pharaoh, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Let my people go, that they may hold a feast unto me in the wilderness," "Pharaoh said, Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go." This proud and daring defiance of the God of Israel was followed up by a mandate to the taskmasters of the people and their

officers, saying, "Ye shall no more give the people straw to make brick, as heretofore: let them go and gather straw for themselves. And the tale of the bricks, which they did make heretofore, ye shall lay upon them; ye shall not diminish ought thereof: for they be idle; therefore they cry, saying, Let us go and sacrifice to our God. Let there more work be laid upon the men, that they may labour therein; and let them not regard vain words."

The consequence of this most tyrannical edict was, that the people were not capable of performing the task imposed upon them, and the officers of the children of Israel, whom the Egyptian taskmasters set over the people, were beaten because the people over whom they were placed could not do what it was absolutely beyond the power of human nature to effect;—and when they cried to Pharaoh, his haughty answer was, "Ye are idle, ye are idle: therefore ye say, Let us go and do sacrifice to the Lord." In this extremity they met Moses and Aaron, and in the bitterness of their grief, I might perhaps say despair, they virtually charged them with having awakened hopes which were never to be realised,—with having, in fact, added to their sufferings instead of relieving them. "The Lord," said they, "look upon you, and judge; because ye have made our savour to be abhorred in the eyes of Pharaoh, and in the eyes of his servants, to put a sword in their hand to slay us." So desperate, indeed, did their condition appear to be, that even Moses himself was staggered, and for a season his faith was ready to fail him; for after hearing the complaint and remonstrance of the officers of the children of Israel, he "returned unto the Lord, and said, Lord, wherefore hast thou so evil entreated this people? why is it that thou hast sent me? For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in thy name, he hath done evil to this people; neither hast thou delivered thy people at all." And with regard to the great body of the people, they were thrown into a state of utter despondency, not only refusing to take any comfort from the promise of God, confirmed as it had been by signs and wonders, but plainly showing that they charged upon that promise all the new calamities which had befallen them; for when Moses was sent again to them with the renewed assurance that God would deliver them, and when he so spake to them as he had been commanded,

they hearkened not unto Moses for anguish of spirit, and for cruel bondage." Nor can we doubt that on this occasion, as well perhaps as on others, they besought Moses to cease from making any attempt to deliver them, as appears from their own confession at a future period, when, under the terror of being overtaken and overwhelmed by Pharaoh and his army, they murmured against Moses, and said, "Is not this the word that we did tell thee in Egypt, saying, Let us alone that we may serve the Egyptians?"

Such, I fear, is often the feeling which is awakened in the mind of sinners when the promises of the Gospel are earnestly urged upon them as the only refuge to which they can betake themselves under the fear and disquietude of a guilty conscience. However painful the tyranny of sin may have become, and however miserable the state of bondage to which it has reduced them, yet the idea of relinquishing, entirely and for ever, the gratifications to which they had so long surrendered themselves is more formidable still; and when urged to flee for refuge to the hope set before them in the Gospel, they hearken not "for anguish of spirit, and for cruel bondage." But all this serves to show, that if they do at length embrace and cling to the Gospel as their only refuge, it is altogether of the grace of God. So it was in the deliverance of Israel; for God's gracious purpose was carried on towards its accomplishment, not only without their aid or concurrence, but for a long time in opposition to their will,—even while their sentiment was that Moses would let them alone, that they might serve the Egyptians.

With regard to Moses himself, though he was for a season depressed and discouraged, yet, on receiving a new assurance that God would rid Israel out of the bondage of the Egyptians, and would redeem them with a stretched-out arm and with great judgments, his confidence was restored, and he set himself to carry into effect the instructions which he received, neither seduced by the hollow proposals nor terrified by the threatenings of Pharaoh. At his word, nine successive judgments were inflicted on the land of Egypt,—each of them bearing testimony to the sovereignty of the God of Israel, and each of them sufficiently severe to demonstate the folly as well as the guilt of daring to resist His will or to defy His power. These plagues, however, did not extort from Pharaoh the liberation of Israel; for though he

did from time to time give his consent to their departure while the hand of God was heavy upon him, and upon his people, and upon his gods,—yet no sooner was the pressure of the judgment withdrawn than he again retracted; and at length, wearied out with the importunity of Moses, and irritated by the steadfastness with which he refused to take any thing less than what he had at first demanded, Pharaoh endeavoured, as his last, his desperate resource, to terrify him into a relinquishment of his purpose: "Get thee from me," said he, "take heed to thyself, see my face no more; for in that day thou seest my face thou shalt die." To this threat Moses replied, with a fortitude and a dignity which nothing but implicit confidence in the word of God could have imparted to him, "Thou hast spoken well, I will see thy face again no more." But "Thus saith the Lord, About midnight will I go out into the midst of Egypt: and all the first-born in the land of Egypt shall die, from the first-born of Pharaoh that sitteth upon his throne, even unto the first-born of the maid-servant that is behind the mill; and all the first-born of beasts. And there shall be a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt, such as there was none like it, nor shall be like it any more. But against any of the children of Israel shall not a dog move his tongue, against man or beast; that ye may know how that the Lord doth put a difference between the Egyptians and Israel. And all these thy servants shall come down unto me, and bow down themselves unto me, saying, Get thee out, and all the people that follow thee; and after that I will go out. And he went out from Pharaoh in a great anger."

Such was the solemn warning with which Moses met the threat of the king of Egypt, and such the judgment which was not only to accomplish what the former had failed to do, but to bring Pharaoh an humble supplicant to the very man whom he had forbidden on pain of death to see his face again. And so it came to pass; for we are told that "Pharaoh rose up in the night, he, and all his servants, and all the Egyptians. . . . . And he called for Moses and Aaron by night, and said, Rise up, and get you forth from among my people, both ye and the children of Israel; and go, serve the Lord, as ye have said. Also take your flocks and your herds, as ye have said, and be gone; and bless me also." And if this judgment was distinguished from all that

preceded it with regard to its effects upon Pharaoh and his people, it was not less remarkable considered with a reference to the children of Israel. While the former judgments of the Lord were abroad on the land of Egypt, it was expressly said of some of them, and we cannot doubt that it was true of them all, that they approached not the dwellings of Israel; for when the Lord brought swarms of flies upon Pharaoh, upon his servants, and upon his people, he severed in that day the land of Goshen, in which his people dwelt, that no swarms of flies were there. When "the hail smote throughout all the land of Egypt all that was in the field, both man and beast, and the hail smote every herb of the field, and brake every tree of the field," "in the land of Goshen, where the children of Israel were, was there no hail." And when "there was a thick darkness in all the land of Egypt," so that "they saw not one another, neither rose any from his place for three days," "all the children of Israel had light in their dwellings." But when the judgment came that was to effect their deliverance, no such direct separation was made between them and the Egyptians. Their exemption from the calamity which overtook Pharaoh and his people was provided for by the appointment of a special ordinance; and on their observance of that ordinance, their safety during that solemn season was suspended. In obedience to the command of God, "Moses called for all the elders of Israel, and said unto them, Draw out and take you a lamb according to your families, and kill the passover. And ye shall take a bunch of hyssop, and dip it in the blood that is in the bason, and strike the lintel and the two side-posts with the blood that is in the bason; and none of you shall go out at the door of his house until the morning. For the Lord will pass through to smite the Egyptians; and when he seeth the blood upon the lintel, and on the two side-posts, the Lord will pass over the door, and will not suffer the destroyer to come in unto your houses to smite you. And ye shall observe this thing for an ordinance to thee and to thy sons for ever. . . . . And it shall come to pass, when your children shall say unto you, What mean ye by this service? that ye shall say, It is the sacrifice of the Lord's passover, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, when he smote the Egyptians, and delivered our houses." And when the people heard this, they "bowed the head and worshipped,

and went away, and did as the Lord had commanded Moses and Aaron, so did they."

Such was the institution of the passover; and by that institution a great accession was made to what the Church already knew of the doctrine of atonement, the salvation of sinners by the shedding of blood. From the beginning, Christ had been set forth to the faith and hope of the Church by sacrifice; and from the beginning, the believing offerer found reconciliation and peace with God through the blood of the sacrifice which he offered. But whether we consider the condition in which the Israelites were placed, or the deliverance which was wrought for them, or the nature of the passover, as at once the means and the memorial of that deliverance, it is evident that there never had before been given so full and so clear a revelation of Christ's mediatorial work. And that this was the great design of the institution is plainly asserted by the apostle, when he says, that "Christ, our passover, is sacrificed for us,"—intimating not only that Christ has done for his redeemed people, the true spiritual Church, what the passover did for Israel, the then visible Church, but that he has accomplished that deliverance in a similar manner, even by the shedding of his blood; and that unless they are sprinkled with that blood, they must be in the same state, in reference to the danger which threatens them, as that in which Israel would have been, in reference to the judgment of Egypt, had they refused or neglected to avail themselves of the appointed way of escape.

All this is still further illustrated by the frequency with which we find the passover alluded to in Scripture, for the purpose of setting forth and explaining the mediatorial work of Christ. The subject of the passover, as we have seen, was a lamb; and we find that "the Lamb" and "the Lamb of God" is a title applied to Christ in the New Testament more frequently than it would be easy to reckon up. The passover, or paschal lamb, we are told, was to be without blemish; and the apostle Peter declares of his Jewish converts that they were redeemed, not "with corruptible things as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." In the ordinance of the passover the lamb was to be slain as a sacrifice, an expiation; and it is said of Christ that he was "sacrificed

for us,"—that he poured out "his soul an offering for sin,"—that he "offered himself without spot to God,"—"a sacrifice, for a sweet-smelling savour,"—that he was "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." The children of Israel were commanded to roast the passover with fire; and what could more expressively foretell and prefigure the inconceivable agony which Christ endured, when, under the curse which he bare for his people, "he began to be sore amazed and to be very heavy,"—and when "his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground?" And further, the children of Israel were commanded to eat the passover,—a command which we cannot now read without being reminded of what our Lord has said of himself, "He that eateth me, even he shall live by me;"—"Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you;"—"Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day." Finally, it was expressly enjoined upon the children of Israel concerning the paschal lamb, "Neither shall ye break a bone thereof;" and we are told by the evangelist John, that the soldiers came and brake the legs of the two thieves who were crucified with our Lord, "but when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs,—that the scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken." Nothing, therefore, could intimate more emphatically than the words of the evangelist do, that the passover was Christ typically or symbolically represented,—that from him and his mediatorial sufferings it derived all its significancy and value,—and that however terrible might be the calamity from which it was the means of saving the children of Israel, or however valuable the blessings which it procured, these were but shadows of calamities and blessings unspeakably more important, even the spiritual bondage from which Christ died to redeem his people, and the spiritual freedom into which he is exalted to translate them,—even the light and liberty of the sons of God.

The truth which was thus figuratively taught in the ordinance of the passover is confirmed and illustrated by the whole tenor of Scripture. To say nothing of the many express declarations to be found there respecting the guilt and misery of men as fallen creatures, exposed to the righteous displeasure of God, we find

that wherever the mediation of Christ is spoken of, it is either distinctly asserted or obviously implied that his work consisted in saving the ruined and the helpless. He declared that the purpose of his appearing was "to seek and to save that which was lost,"—that he had come, "not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many,"—and that his blood was to be "shed for the remission of sins." And so have his apostles testified; for they assert that "he suffered, the just for the unjust,"—that he "hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us,"—and that he has made peace, and reconciled us to God by "the blood of his cross." So full is Scripture of statements like these, that every man who says he believes the Gospel must be held as admitting that the evil from which he expects to be delivered by the blood of Christ cannot be adequately represented by any temporal calamity whatever; and the momentous question, therefore, with every one of us is, How are we to reap the benefit of Christ our passover, as the Israelites did that of the paschal lamb on the memorable night referred to in this passage? The Passover has been slain, the blood of sprinkling has been shed, and all are invited freely to avail themselves of it, as providing a refuge from the wrath to come.

But the Scriptures plainly teach that all do not reap the benefit of that refuge. How, then, does this blood of sprinkling become available for our personal safety? To this question the Scriptures reply, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved;" and the subject before us may help to illustrate the meaning of this statement. Though there is not in our case any visible refuge, any sensible hiding-place, to which we are required to betake ourselves, as the Israelites were commanded to do on the night of the passover,—yet their conduct on that occasion, and the state of mind and feeling which that conduct implied, may furnish us with a very clear and interesting illustration of the nature of that faith with which salvation is inseparably connected. It was, no doubt, their outward obedience to the letter of the divine commandment,—their killing the passover—sprinkling the blood on their door-posts—and remaining shut up in their houses till the morning,—that was the immediate means of their protection, while the destroying angel passed

through the land of Egypt. But it is obvious that this course of outward acting was but the indication of a certain state of mind towards God, to which their safety is really to be traced, and which is emphatically described when it is said of them, that on receiving the divine command, "they bowed the head and worshipped." They were convinced of the reality and certainty of the danger which threatened them, and of which they had been forewarned; they were equally convinced that the promise of safety could not fail to be accomplished to as many as should confide in it; and they were persuaded, though many other judgments had failed, that the blood of the paschal lamb would be to them not only a security during that eventful night, but a pledge that the following morning should bring them deliverance. Their reverential and ready compliance with the divine commandment showed that such was the state of mind towards God into which they had been brought. They acknowledged the rectitude and wisdom of his procedure; they relied implicitly on the faithfulness of his promises; and such being their sentiment, it could not fail to issue in an unhesitating obedience to his commandment. It was this state of mind that constituted the moral character of the transaction, in so far as they were concerned; this was the faith by which the ordinance of the passover became available for their protection in the season of danger; and to this the apostle refers when he says, "Through faith Moses kept the passover, and the sprinkling of blood, lest he that destroyed the first-born should touch them."

Now, though there is no one definite act by the performance of which we can infallibly secure an interest in Christ's redemption, as Israel did in the benefit of the passover, by sprinkling the blood on the door-posts, and shutting themselves up in their houses, yet it is a very plain and intelligible thing to say, that the faith which is inseparably connected with salvation is just such a state of mind respecting Christ as that which the Israelites felt and manifested with respect to the first passover. No reflecting man, I think, can be at a loss to conceive what the faith of the Israelites was, whereby they were prompted to adopt the measures which were necessary for their preservation; and to determine whether we have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us in the Gospel, and are dwelling in the

secret place of the Most High, and abiding under the shadow of the Almighty, we would do well to inquire, whether we are as truly convinced of our guilt, and danger, and helplessness, as the Israelites were of the reality of the destruction to which they were exposed,—whether we have acquiesced in the prescribed way of escape as cordially as they did in the observance of the passover,—whether we feel that we are as dependent on the blood of Christ for protection from coming wrath, as they felt themselves to be on that of the paschal lamb for safety when the angel of death passed through the land,—and whether in heart and soul we have cast ourselves as unreservedly upon Him as they did on the pledge of the divine faithfulness, when, having sprinkled their door-posts, they withdrew each to his own habitation, and went not forth of the door of his house until the morning. So long as men deal with faith as a subject of discussion, they may deceive themselves, and fancy that they believe in Christ, while there is nothing like an approving acquiescence in the proposals of the Gospel; but if they would seriously reflect, they could hardly misunderstand the nature of faith in Christ, as consisting in the same state of mind respecting him, as that of the Israelites towards the paschal lamb; nor could they fail to perceive, that though the preservation of Israel, by the ordinance of the passover, was a thing more palpable to the senses, there may be, and there actually is, a transaction not less real on the part of every man who has fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before him in the Gospel.

But the ordinance of the passover, while it furnishes a very interesting illustration of the nature of faith, is fitted also to aid our conceptions of the experimental and practical effects of that faith, wherever it is wrought in the heart by the power of the Spirit of God. It constitutes, indeed, no small part of the value of Old Testament types, that they render palpable, as it were, to the common understanding of every man who will think at all, those exercises of thought and feeling which form so large a part of the real character of the Christian; but which they who are strangers to them are but too ready to misunderstand, or to regard as altogether visionary and fanciful. Such types, therefore, furnish tests of state and character, which, if seriously applied,

can hardly be misunderstood. Were we to dwell on the peace, and everlasting consolation, and good hope through grace, which the true believer enjoys,—or on the great motive by which he is actuated, and which alone dictates cheerful obedience and devout submission, even his sense of obligation to Christ,—there are probably not a few who would be neither very willing to entertain nor very able clearly to understand such statements, and who might persuade themselves, that in order to reap all the benefits of the Gospel, it is not very necessary to understand or interpret with precision the language in which the Scriptures describe the comfort and the hopes of the Christian. But however little there may be in a man's experience to explain the import of those terms in which the Scriptures embody the faith and feelings of believers, he can have no difficulty in conceiving himself placed in similar circumstances with those of the Israelites on the night of the passover ; and supposing that, like them, he believed in the certainty of all that was foretold, and confided in the faithfulness of all that was promised, he may conceive somewhat also of what his state of mind would be. He can imagine what the feelings of the children of Israel must have been when they received from Moses the divine communication which he was commanded to deliver,—the solemn awe with which they must have contemplated so near and so appalling a danger,—the relief and lightening of heart which they experienced when they heard of the appointed means of safety,—the eagerness with which they would turn their thoughts to the blood which had been sprinkled on the door-posts of their houses, when the hour of danger approached,—the revival of hope which the recollection of that blood would create, as often as their faith was ready to fail amidst the destruction that was wasting around them,—the gratitude and gladness with which they welcomed the dawn of that morning which disclosed to them the terrible consequences of the divine judgment upon Egypt, and the extent of the divine mercy towards themselves,—and the readiness with which they would at that moment place themselves at the disposal of Him who had done such great things on their behalf. Now, such in kind, and such in some measure or degree, will be the experience of all who have really fled for refuge to the hope set before them in the Gospel.

It will be said, perhaps, that in the case of the Israelites, both the danger and the deliverance being so palpable, there would be awakened a more lively apprehension both of the one and the other than can be expected to be felt in regard to spiritual danger and a spiritual deliverance. I grant that, in point of fact, it may be so. We are here encompassed with infirmities,—we are naturally prone to what is earthly,—our souls do indeed cleave unto the dust; and whatever, therefore, goes directly to affect our temporal condition may be found to awaken more lively emotions, whether of sorrow or of gladness, than that which relates to our spiritual and future interests. But surely, if we do in truth and sincerity believe the Bible, we must in some degree have been affected by it, according to the nature of the truths which it contains; and if there be such a close resemblance, as we have seen there is, between the temporal condition of the Israelites at the institution of the passover and our own spiritual condition, we must have recognised in their experience on that occasion something of what we have experienced in contemplating that blood which cleanses from all sin. If we be really convinced that our state as sinners is as guilty, and miserable, and helpless as the Scriptures represent it to be, it must have been a very interesting and momentous question with us, how we shall escape the wrath to come. If we believe that a way, and the only way, of escape has been provided in the blood of Christ, whereby he has made peace, and through which we may have boldness to enter into the holiest, our satisfaction and feeling of security in contemplating his atonement must have corresponded in some measure with our sense of the danger against which it protects us. If we have had from time to time our seasons of depression and fear, when the consciousness of sin and a sense of the divine purity and holiness awakened misgivings and doubts, our thoughts, like those of Israel of old, must have turned to the blood of sprinkling; and in proportion as we could realise the efficacy of that blood, and the depth of that divine love to which it bears testimony, in the same degree our hope must have revived, and our hearts have been reassured before God. If we have thus become partakers of everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, we must have felt ourselves constrained to live no more to ourselves, but to Him who died for us, and who rose again.

XXV.

THE PILLAR OF CLOUD AND FIRE.

EXODUS XIII. 21, 22.

WHEN Moses, by divine authority, instituted the ordinance of the passover, one of the many instructions which he delivered on the occasion was in these words: "And thus shall ye eat it; with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and ye shall eat it in haste: it is the Lord's passover." With this injunction, as well as every other that was then laid upon them, the people of Israel complied; for it is recorded of them, that after receiving from Moses all the instructions which had been delivered to him, they "went away, and did as the Lord had commanded Moses and Aaron, so did they." The people of Israel, then, ate the passover with their loins girded, their shoes on their feet, and their staff in their hand; and in doing so they expressed, in a most emphatic manner, not only their anxiety to escape from the bondage of Egypt, but their willingness to go whithersoever God might direct them. Their whole attitude and manner indicated a readiness to encounter any difficulty and meet any danger which might lie in their way; unknown as that way was to them, and unable as they must have been to estimate all the hardships and trials which awaited them.

They could not but know, indeed, what they had been frequently told, that they were about to set out on a journey which was to terminate in their establishment in the land of

Canaan; and they ought, moreover, to have known that on their establishment there was suspended the fulfilment of the one great promise to Abraham, "In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed." Still they did not and could not know what they would be called to endure in travelling thither. They were warned that their journey lay through a desert; for the request which they were commanded to prefer to Pharaoh was that he would allow them to go three days' journey into the wilderness to sacrifice unto the Lord their God. But beyond this they knew, and could know, nothing. Yet such was their anxiety to escape from the intolerable bondage of Egypt,—such the deep and solemn impression made on their minds by the fearful judgment employed for their deliverance,—and such their confidence, for the time, in the faithfulness of the divine promise communicated by Moses,—that they held themselves in readiness, though we cannot doubt with solemn awe, to enter on their journey at a moment's warning, and to go out, though they knew not whither they went. And so they did accordingly; for scarcely had they eaten the passover in haste, when Pharaoh and the Egyptians became urgent upon them to depart without delay, and they departed, "six hundred thousand on foot that were men, beside children. And a mixed multitude went up also with them; and flocks, and herds, even very much cattle. And they baked unleavened cakes of the dough which they brought forth out of Egypt, for it was not leavened; because they were thrust out of Egypt, and could not tarry, neither had they prepared for themselves any victuals."

Never, from the beginning of the world to the present hour, has such a sight been exhibited as on the night of the institution of the passover, when a million, at least, of human beings, with one accord, put themselves under the guidance of a single individual, to be by him conducted to a land very distant, and through a wilderness, the perils of which they were little able to estimate or conceive of. I do not at present speak of Moses,—of the overwhelming, the crushing responsibility which he must have felt lying upon his head, when he beheld the countless multitudes of the tribes of Israel beginning to move at his signal, and to follow the direction which he pointed out,—he himself being the only individual who knew any thing of the waste

howling wilderness through which he was to conduct a whole nation of oppressed and degraded slaves, with their wives and children, and the unexpected wealth which had poured in upon them through the fears of their terrified oppressors. Many sublime and eloquent things have been said of the leaders of mighty armies, both of ancient and modern times, when placed in trying circumstances, in which they felt themselves responsible for extricating their ten, or, it might be, their hundred thousand devoted followers from impending ruin, or for bringing to a successful issue a conflict on which the fate of kingdoms might ultimately be suspended. But what, among all these examples of great peril and deep responsibility, can once be compared with the weight which lay upon Moses, when he set out at the head of the tribes of Israel, with little more than a single meal of unleavened bread, to conduct them through a desert full of danger, and destitute of every thing that could minister to their subsistence? It is not, however, of Moses that I am now required to speak, marvellous as this part of his history is. It is to the readiness with which the people of Israel put themselves under his guidance that our attention is now directed; and whatever their subsequent conduct might be, it was assuredly a very striking proof of their confidence in Moses, as divinely commissioned, that they placed themselves implicitly at his disposal, and were ready to follow him whithersoever he might lead them. And this act of obedience was most graciously met by such a manifestation of the divine favour and approval as ought to have been a pledge to them, never to be doubted or distrusted, that whatever difficulties they might be involved in, or whatever dangers they might have to encounter, they would assuredly be carried over them all. For no sooner had they set out on their extraordinary journey than a visible token of the divine presence was vouchsafed to them:—"The Lord went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and night."

This circumstance in the history of Israel, like every other event in that history, is full of most important instruction. I assume, what must be obvious to all who are familiar with Scripture truth, and with the mode of Scripture teaching, that in the

departure of Israel from Egypt, in their journey through the wilderness, and in their entering on the possession of Canaan, there is typically set forth the spiritual deliverance of sinners in their conversion to God, the pilgrimage through which they pass in their way Zion-ward, and their entrance at last on the heavenly Canaan; and assuming that all this is figuratively represented in the history of God's ancient people, the subject brought before us in these and the preceding verses admits of an immediate application to believers of all times. The profession which Israel made of their anxiety to leave the bondage and abominations of Egypt, and of their willingness to follow Moses, is in substance the very profession which all must be held as making, who declare that under a sense of the guilt and burden of sin, and longing for deliverance from its pollution, as well as its condemnation, they look to Christ for that deliverance, and are ready to follow him as the Captain of their salvation. And those who have thus really embraced Christ, and who can remember when or how it was that they were first awakened to a true sense of their condition as sinners, and constrained to seek after an interest in him, as that for the want of which the universe could afford them no compensation, will be able to enter very deeply into the feelings with which Israel of old came to the resolution of putting themselves under the guidance of Moses, and, on the strength of the divine promise, entering on an untried and unknown journey.

When sinners are first aroused to serious reflection on their preceding life, discovering that they have been living, if not in open and flagrant violation of the divine law, at least in thoughtlessness and frivolity, walking in the sight of their own eyes, and after the desires of their own heart,—without any solemn thoughts of God, and judgment, and eternity; and when they are convinced that unless they are forgiven and reconciled to God, they must be for ever miserable and undone,—they will then feel that they have been as truly in a state of bondage as ever the people of Israel were in the land of Egypt; and their deliverance from it will be the one great and engrossing object of their concern. And if, as is not unfrequently the case with newly awakened sinners, they labour to break off their sinful habits and disentangle their affections from the vanities and

follies by which they have been held bound, and have their thoughts occupied with what is holy and heavenly,—endeavouring by such efforts and such exercises of self-denial to quiet their troubled spirits, and find rest to their souls,—they will for a time only add to the bitterness of that bondage to which they have been made alive, and will feel that there is still something else wanting which is essential to their peace, and which is not to be attained to by any efforts of their own.

They are, in fact, vainly attempting to propitiate the divine favour, and to reconcile themselves to God,—not perceiving that this was Christ's work, the very purpose for which he became incarnate, and suffered, and died. But when they do make the blessed discovery that Christ has finished the work which the Father gave him to do, even that of making peace by his blood, —and that their deliverance from condemnation has been wrought out for them, and is as freely tendered to them as was the redemption of Israel from their Egyptian slavery,—then they begin to experience enlargement and relief from the fears and doubts which oppressed them; and as this blessed truth becomes more fully and clearly unfolded to their understanding, and their hearts become more deeply affected with a sense of their obligation to Him who loved them, and washed them from their sins in his own blood, they will not only be ready, but anxious to put themselves under his guidance,—and, in the ardour of their first love, they may feel as if it were impossible that they could ever shrink from any duty to which he plainly calls them, or complain of any hardship or self-denial which they may be required for his name's sake to undergo. They will be prepared, without hesitation or misgiving, to take up their cross and follow him. And if in this state of mind and feeling they should have an opportunity of sitting down at a communion-table, there to commemorate the death of Christ as their Passover who has been sacrificed for them, how closely will their condition in these circumstances resemble that of the people of Israel on the first observance of the passover! Like Israel, they have just had opened up to them a way of escape from a state of bondage which had become intolerable,—they are only, as it were, entering on the journey which lies between them and the land of promise,—and they are receiving, in the symbols of the body

and blood of their slain Passover, a pledge not only of their deliverance from the land of bondage, but of their safe conduct through the wilderness to the land of rest. And while they receive that pledge in faith, and in the strength of it surrender themselves without reserve to the direction and disposal of their Divine Guide, they are in the very temper and attitude of Israel of old, when, with their loins girded, their shoes on their feet, and their staff in their hand, they did in haste eat the passover, and, having done so, followed the guidance of the pillar of a cloud which led them the way.

We could hardly avoid inferring from the obvious design of all God's dealings with his people, that the fact recorded in these verses, as well as every other, was intended to instruct and encourage the Church in all times. But that this was its purpose is placed beyond all doubt by the general statement of the apostle in reference to the divine dispensations towards Israel at the period of their history here referred to, when he says, "Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples; and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come." As their journey, then, was typical of the spiritual pilgrimage of believers, so the pillar which went before them, as a cloud by day, and as fire by night, was a type, and consequently a pledge, of that divine guidance by which believers in all ages will be led, and which will not be withdrawn till they have reached the inheritance towards which they are travelling; for God "took not away the pillar of the cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people."

These verses, then, contain the promise which is elsewhere expressly stated in Scripture,—namely, that Christ will be with his people always. That promise is very plainly involved in many things which are said of Christ, as illustrative of his character and work,—as when in the Old Testament he is called "the Captain of the Lord's host," and in the New, "the Captain of salvation," or when he calls himself "the good Shepherd," whose voice his sheep know, so that they follow him. But that promise is presented to us in these verses in a peculiarly interesting and instructive light. It is not merely a general declaration that Christ will be with his people, but an assurance that he will go before them, to lead them the way, and consequently

will provide for them all that he knows to be needful for the journey. He does not tell them beforehand, any more than he told Israel, what are the peculiar trials which they are to meet with, or the special conflicts which they are to undergo; for if he did, and if they foresaw all that they were to encounter, they would assuredly set themselves to find, in schemes of their own devising, the means of overcoming these obstacles, and would forget their absolute dependence on Him through whom alone they can ever gain the victory over their spiritual enemies. But he has told them in general terms, that in the world they shall have tribulation, just as Israel were told that they had to pass through the wilderness; and having told them this,—having warned them that through much tribulation they must enter into the kingdom of God,—he requires that they shall leave it to him to determine the nature and extent of these tribulations; and that although they may find these trials to be unexpected, and also more severe than they reckoned on, yet they shall not rebel, or give way to suspicion and distrust in regard to his grace and mercy.

All this I would especially press upon young Christians,—upon those who have in truth and sincerity given themselves to Christ, who are willing to be saved and sanctified by him in any way that he is pleased to employ, but who may not have had much experience of the many trials which all devout believers will assuredly meet with, if they are determined to adhere to the course of living and acting which the love of Christ, if ruling in the heart, will not fail to suggest and enforce. So long as we know only the general warning, that in the world we shall have tribulation, we may flatter ourselves that we are prepared to meet it all,—as Israel thought when they went up harnessed out of the land of Egypt. But we may think and feel very differently when we come actually to encounter shame and reproach for His name's sake. If, then, we would really triumph over all this, let us not seek for encouragement in schemes of our own devising whereby to evade the trials which threaten us, or sit down to ask ourselves how we may disarm the enmity and opposition of the world, or to inquire whether by yielding on some points, which may appear to be in themselves unimportant, we may not be left at liberty to pursue without molestation the course which

the Gospel prescribes to us in all that is really necessary, as we may think, for the maintenance of our Christian character. Let us remember, that in compromising our principles on the smallest point and in the slightest degree, we relinquish a heavenly Guide, the dictate and direction of Infinite Wisdom, for the suggestion of carnal reasoning; and having done so even on the smallest point, how can we with any confidence or expectation of success look for the direction and support of that heavenly Guide in matters of greater moment? Our only safety is to bear in mind that we have entered on a journey on which we cannot advance one step in safety, but as Christ, by his Word and Spirit, shall direct and support us. We do not, indeed, see a pillar of cloud by day, nor a pillar of fire by night, going before us. But if we have really, in truth and sincerity, given ourselves to Christ, he does as certainly go before us as the cloud of glory did before Israel in the wilderness; and if with simplicity of mind, and a teachable frame of spirit, we go to the Bible, and at the same time to a throne of grace, to seek out the way Zionward, we shall find that Christ is as truly with us as he was with the Old Testament Church, when he both led and followed them through the wilderness,—visiting them with light in the midst of darkness, and refreshment when they were parched and weary, until he brought them to the "mountain which his right hand had purchased."

I might illustrate the subject of these remarks by referring to many instances, in the history of Scripture saints, of the gracious interposition of Christ in behalf of his people, even when there was no such visible manifestation of his presence as we find recorded in this chapter. But I am willing to believe that there are many who can bear testimony in their own experience,—many who can say, on looking back on their past history, that the pillar of the cloud by day, and the pillar of fire by night, has never been taken away from before them. In respect to spiritual privileges and the means of grace, they will be ready to acknowledge that Christ has been faithful to his promise,—that from the moment when they were awakened to the infinite importance of their soul's salvation, many precious opportunities have been afforded to them of becoming more and more acquainted with divine truth,—that when, involved in perplexity and darkness,

they betook themselves to the Scriptures in a prayerful and teachable frame of spirit, they found the Word of God to be a lamp unto their feet, and a light unto their path,—and that when deprived for a season of some of their wonted privileges, in being prevented from waiting on God in some of his public ordinances, they have found that their privation was more than compensated by unwonted communications of light and comfort in the use of the means which were still left to them,—even in prayer, and reading the Scriptures, and devout meditation, and converse with Christian friends. In all these instances, they have had as satisfactory evidence of Christ's presence with them, as Israel had when they looked upon the cloud which went before them by day and by night.

And even in regard to their worldly concerns,—in which they are most in danger of losing sight of their heavenly Guide, or even of fearing at times that he has forsaken them,—they will on reflection acknowledge that he has never been unfaithful to his promise. They may have been overtaken by painful and unexpected trials; and under the first shock of these trials, they may have given way to feelings not very different from repining and distrust; and instead of at once acknowledging the hand of God in them, or looking to their heavenly Guide for light and relief under them, they may have dwelt in a sad and sorrowful frame of spirit upon them, as if they had been visited by some strange thing from which they might have been exempted. But when brought to a better mind, they will discover and acknowledge that they were graciously dealt with, even in the severest and most painful of their trials. They will be convinced, perhaps, that they had begun to wander from the path on which they had entered, and in which alone they were warranted to expect that the light from heaven would go before them,—that their affections had been gradually and insensibly drawn away and alienated from Him who is supremely entitled to the first place in their hearts,—that their worldly concerns had become either so prosperous or so perplexing as to engross their thoughts and call forth their energies, to the temporary neglect of those things that concern their eternal interests,—and that they were in great danger of making shipwreck of faith and a good conscience. And when they discover that it has been thus with them,

—that they have forsaken the light from heaven, and followed for a season one or other of the manifold delusions whereby even Christians are constantly in danger of being misled,—and that affliction has been seasonably employed to awaken them to a sense of their danger, and has been made effectual for bringing them back to the right way,—they will acknowledge that this very affliction, however sharp it may have been, is to them the most unequivocal proof of the faithfulness of God's promise,—that though they had lost sight of their heavenly Guide, he had not lost sight of them,—that he was still near them, and still ready to lead and to keep them in the way,—and that when they ceased to be won by his forbearance and mercy, he employed chastisement to recover them from their wanderings. They will say, therefore, with the Psalmist, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted;" for "before I was afflicted I went astray."

But affliction is not always for chastisement alone. The people of Israel were in want of water before they murmured against Moses, and charged him with the cruel design of having brought them into the wilderness to kill them, and their children, and their cattle, with thirst. But their complaint was a very unreasonable one. They were warned before they left Egypt that they had to pass through the wilderness; and they acquiesced in this appointment, though they might and ought to have known that there they would have to encounter many difficulties and endure many privations. And so with believers still. Independently altogether of chastisement,—of which, however, none are ever without the need,—they are warned that they must encounter much tribulation. Israel could not travel out of Egypt to Canaan without meeting danger, and undergoing tribulation in one form or another. And it is equally impossible for believers, themselves sinners and sojourners in a sinful world, to pass through the process by which they are to be purified, and made meet for an inheritance of pure and holy blessedness, without experiencing somewhat of the bitter consequences of that spiritual malady which cleaves to themselves, and which has deeply infected all around them. They are accordingly taught to expect all this; and if they murmur when they find it realised, then they are drawing back from their own solemn engagement, when they declared their readiness to follow the Captain

of their salvation, who was himself made perfect through suffering. He has no way of conducting them to the heavenly Canaan but through trial and tribulation; for though he has power enough to do so, it were inconsistent with his wisdom and his grace so to exercise his power. It is in seasons of trial and tribulation that he makes to them the brightest manifestations of his love and faithfulness,—and it is in such seasons that they appreciate, as they could not do at any other time, these tokens of his loving-kindness. They would lose, therefore, what through all eternity they will feel and acknowledge to have been unspeakably precious to them, if they were exempted from the salutary discipline of affliction. And even now they will enjoy what mere exemption from trial never could afford them, if they habitually bear in mind that their lot is of God's choosing, and that it has been chosen by him out of ten thousand which he might have appointed. Whatever may be the hardships which they are called to endure, they know not how much more numerous and severe these might have been, had God led them by another way than that by which he has led them. Israel did, no doubt, meet with much to discourage and depress them during their sojourn in the waste howling wilderness, even though they did enjoy the symbol of the divine presence; yet painful as their trials were, and rough as the way might appear to them to be, that way was selected in great mercy and tenderness to them: for "God led them not through the way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near; for God said, Lest peradventure the people repent when they see war, and they return to Egypt: but God led the people about, through the way of the wilderness of the Red Sea." Let Christians, then, bear in mind that thus also God deals with them. Let them seek their consolation and support in the thought that Christ goes before them, so long as they are willing to follow him; and that if they unreservedly surrender themselves to his guidance, he will by his own Word and Spirit direct them in perplexity, enlighten them in darkness, and sustain them under trial; and when at last they enter the dark valley of the shadow of death, he will go before them still,—his rod and his staff will comfort them,—and he will present them faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding great joy.

XXVI.

PASSAGE OF THE RED SEA.

EXODUS XIV. 16-31.

It would appear from the preceding passage, that Moses was for a season involved in some degree of perplexity and trouble. Nor can we wonder that he was so. With the Red Sea before, the armies of Pharaoh behind, and the people of Israel assailing him with bitter accusations and in language of despondency, his condition was to all appearance the most hopeless; and when the command was given him, "Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward," we might conceive that for a moment that command might serve to embarrass him still more. But when it was immediately added, "Lift thou up thy rod, and stretch out thine hand over the sea, and divide it," we can as easily conceive that his perplexity was at an end, and that he instantly saw in what way God was to deliver his people. For how many recollections must have crowded upon his mind on receiving such a command! When he left the wilderness of Midian, with a divine commission to go down into Egypt to bring up his brethren out of bondage, it was said to him, "Thou shalt take this rod in thine hand, wherewith thou shalt do signs;" and how largely this prediction was fulfilled, the preceding chapters of this Book do abundantly testify. The stretching out of that rod at the divine command was time after time followed with the most appalling judgments; and never did the threatened calamity fail to come on the appointed signal. Moses or Aaron stretched out the rod, emphatically called "the rod of

God," and the water of the river, the fruitful source of the wealth of Egypt, was converted into blood,—the land was covered with loathsome insects, numerous as the small dust of the earth,—a grievous murrain seized the cattle and the horses, the asses and the camels, throughout all the land of Egypt,—every green thing which had not been previously smitten by the lightning and hail was devoured by the locust,—sore disease broke forth upon man and upon beast, in every quarter of the land,—and for three days Egypt was shrouded in the deepest darkness, even darkness that might be felt. All these judgments followed each other in rapid succession on Moses stretching out his shepherd's rod. Of all these, therefore, he must have been vividly and very impressively reminded by the command in the passage before us to stretch out his rod over the sea; and every doubt or misgiving as to his own and the people's escape must from that moment have been dissipated. The rod, which, no doubt, appeared at first a very contemptible thing in the sight of Pharaoh, had proved, to the terror and dismay of that haughty monarch, the rod of God's strength, and had afforded Moses such testimonies to the power and faithfulness of God as were sufficient to sustain him even in circumstances apparently the most desperate. He was now, as appears from the preceding passage, in such circumstances; and whatever temporary misgiving might have come over him, it must have vanished when he was commanded to lift up his rod, and stretch out his hand over the sea, and divide it. The command did not merely involve a promise that the sea would be divided,—it was as if it conveyed to Moses the power of dividing it; and it could not fail to call up in his mind the recollection of all the marvellous things which God had done in the sight of Israel, "in the land of Egypt, in the field of Zoan."

Such, we cannot doubt, was the encouragement which Moses derived from his former experience in the trying circumstances in which he was placed on the occasion here referred to. And such is the use which believers may and ought still to make of their experience. They must have been very careless, very culpably negligent in observing the dealings of God with them, if they cannot recollect instances of his gracious interposition on their behalf,—of deliverance from evils which they dreaded,—of

the mitigation of trials under which they were ready to sink,—of unexpected consolation in seasons of affliction and sorrow,—and of the communication of strength, beyond what they looked for or reckoned on, in the discharge of duties which required many painful sacrifices of personal ease and self-indulgence, as well as much patient, and, it may be, long-continued endurance. And in looking back on these, may they not and ought they not to draw from them such encouragement as shall go to strengthen their confidence in God's gracious interposition for them under new trials? Their experience, indeed, of his mercy in time past furnishes no pledge that he will deliver them in time to come, in the way or at the moment that they may desire. But it is a pledge; it is designed to assure them that if they will confide in him, he will either deliver them from their trial, and so disappoint as well as rebuke all their fears,—or he will minister the strength necessary to sustain and the grace needful to improve them: and this conviction will go far to remove all the darkness and the mystery which may sometimes hang over the divine dispensations. So it was with the Psalmist. He was greatly perplexed on beholding the prosperity of ungodly men, while he and others like him were greatly afflicted; and in the midst of his perplexity he was ready to say, "Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency: for all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning;" and on another occasion, when, in the anguish of his spirit, he cried out, "Will the Lord cast off for ever? and will he be favourable no more? Is his mercy clean gone for ever? doth his promise fail for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?" It was in the recollection of his own experience, and the experience of the Church in former times, that he found an explanation of all his perplexities and relief from all his misgivings. "And I said, This is my infirmity: but I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High. I will remember the works of the Lord: surely I will remember thy wonders of old. I will meditate also of all thy work, and talk of thy doings. Thy way, O God, is in the sanctuary: who is so great a God as our God! Thou art the God that doest wonders: thou hast declared thy strength among the people."

But while, in the simple command given to Moses to stretch out his rod over the sea and divide it, there was enough to assure him, from what he had already experienced, that a way was to be thereby opened for Israel to pass through, he was further assured in express terms that it would be so: "The children of Israel shall go on dry ground through the midst of the sea." Nor was this all. Moses was further told that he would see fulfilled on Pharaoh and his host all that he had predicted, when he said to the people of Israel, "The Egyptians whom ye have seen to-day, ye shall see them again no more for ever." "And I, behold, I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians, and they shall follow them" (Israel): "and I will get me honour upon Pharaoh, and upon all his host, upon his chariots, and upon his horsemen." This is a very solemn,—a very awful statement. But it is a truth so explicitly announced, and so frequently referred to in Scripture, that it must be designed to convey most important practical instruction, and ought, therefore, to be deeply and seriously pondered. The full import of what is implied in hardening Pharaoh's heart I profess not to explain. One thing is certain, it could not mean the infusion of ungodly or rebellious principles into his heart; for God never so hardened or tempted any man. Nor was there any need of such influence to excite Pharaoh's enmity against God. That enmity was so strong and so violent that nothing could restrain it from breaking out into the most daring acts of rebellion against God himself, and of violence against God's people, but the dictate of self-interest, or the dread of impending judgment. He was the most obstinate of all the rebels we read of who ever despised the authority or defied the power of God. The real object of the protracted conflict which he maintained with Moses was to dispute the sovereignty, and ultimately to disprove the supremacy of Jehovah, by showing that he could, and that he would, retain Israel in bondage, in spite of the God whom they served. In the course of that conflict he witnessed more than perhaps any man before his time had ever witnessed of the mighty power of God,—manifested, too, in a way the most palpable and impressive,—so impressive that he was compelled to acknowledge his own helplessness, as well as the weakness, the utter impotency, of his gods,—and to beseech Moses that he would entreat

the Lord for him. It was befitting the divine rectitude, therefore, that Pharaoh should be visited with such a retribution as might demonstrate God's sovereignty, in opposition to the false gods of the heathen, and vindicate his justice in the punishment of such daring rebellion. But for the encouragement of the Church, the people of God, of that and all subsequent times, it was so ordered that this punishment should be inflicted on their account, and in immediate connection with their deliverance; and when it was said, "I will get me honour upon Pharaoh, and upon all his host," there was no doubt an allusion to the effect which this event was to produce, in laying the fear of Israel and the dread of them on the inhabitants of Canaan, and thus magnifying the name of God among the heathen.

What the motives or considerations were by which Pharaoh was immediately actuated in venturing to follow Israel into the sea, it is unnecessary to inquire. He might for a time be unconscious that he had done so, in consequence of the darkness in which he was enveloped; or if knowing it, he might ascribe the retiring of the waters to some natural cause, of which he might avail himself as well as the Israelites; or in his nearness to the objects of his pursuit, and in his eagerness to overtake them, he might forget altogether the dangers that surrounded him. That he was actuated by some motive to which he voluntarily surrendered himself, there can be no doubt; for he did himself give it as a reason for his pursuing after Israel, that he repented having let them go from serving him. But though he was undoubtedly pursuing the dictates of his own carnal mind, anxious to gratify his pride and avarice, and thirsting for revenge on those by whom he had been baffled, it is not less true that, in the way of righteous retribution, he was smitten with judicial blindness of mind and hardness of heart,—given up to the entire dominion of his ungodly passions; and, accordingly, while he pursued after the objects of his malignity, and was on the point, as he thought, of overtaking them, and of avenging himself for all the mortification which he had endured, he was only hurrying onward to the ruin which awaited him. For "it came to pass, that in the morning watch the Lord looked unto the host of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and of the cloud, and troubled the host of the Egyptians, and took off

their chariot wheels, that they drave them heavily: so that the Egyptians said, Let us flee from the face of Israel; for the Lord fighteth for them against the Egyptians..... And Moses stretched forth his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to his strength when the morning appeared; and the Egyptians fled against it; and the Lord overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea."

The history of Pharaoh is full of very solemn instruction. It furnishes a striking example of what we cannot doubt is no uncommon thing,—an impenitent sinner forsaken of God, and given up to the government of his own corrupt desires and ungodly affections. His case, it is true, was a very remarkable one; for he was placed in circumstances where the enmity of his carnal mind against God had full and frequent opportunities of manifesting itself,—and that, too, in the face of such proofs and demonstrations of the divine sovereignty as few had ever an opportunity of witnessing. It may be supposed, therefore, that because his was an example of extreme impiety, the judgment with which he was visited, in being smitten with judicial blindness, is to be regarded as a rare thing. But the conclusion were a very dangerous one. We must never forget that remarkable examples have been recorded in Scripture, because it is by such examples that great principles are more clearly illustrated, and vital truths more powerfully enforced. As all believers have not the faith of Abraham, so all impenitent sinners have not manifested the daring hardihood of Pharoah. There may, therefore, be many such cases as his, though they have not been made so palpable as to warrant any one to pronounce them such. And the Scriptures plainly teach that it is so. The apostle declares of the heathen who had wilfully shut their eyes to the proofs which had been afforded them of the being, and perfections, and sovereignty of God, and who did not like to retain God in their knowledge, that he gave them over to a reprobate mind. And elsewhere, speaking of the apostacy which was to take place in the Christian Church, the same apostle declares that God would send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie. And how awfully solemn, then, is the warning which this truth, so strikingly illustrated in the passage under consideration, holds out to those who have all their life long trifled with the Gospel,—who have sur-

rendered themselves to carelessness and indifference,—it may be to indulgence in what they know to be condemned by the Word of God,—and who, in spite of many admonitions in providence, and many entreaties and invitations addressed to them in the Gospel, have never made their present spiritual condition or their prospects for eternity the subject of deliberate and anxious inquiry. Surely, it is a very solemn and momentous question to all such, how long they mean to continue thus to deal with the subject of their eternal interests; and whether they can reckon on having either the will or the power at some future period to entertain and embrace the proposals of the Gospel. We are not entitled to say at any moment that God has forsaken them, and that their day of grace is closed. On the contrary, we are authorised and commanded to proclaim to every man, even till the last hour of his mortal existence, a free salvation through the blood of the Cross. But we are also commanded to warn them, that impenitent sinners may be given up to an evil heart of unbelief,—even unto strong delusion, to believe a lie. And we would remind those also who have been awakened to serious concern about their salvation, of the salutary warning which even they may derive from the subject before us. It is a warning to them to beware of the first conscious tendency of their minds towards coldness and indifference,—the first step towards those worldly pursuits which they know to be incompatible with a growing taste for divine truth, and a steady advancement in the divine life. Whatever may have been the earnestness with which they gave themselves to the subject of the Gospel, or whatever they may think of the sincerity of their profession, there are discouragements enough in the world to cool the ardour of their first love, and temptations enough to shake the steadfastness, and sorely to try the strength of their first resolutions. And if, therefore, they become conscious either of coldness or inconsistency, let them seriously reflect that the first step towards backsliding may be the commencement of that process whereby the heart is "hardened through the deceitfulness of sin."

These reflections have been suggested by what is here stated concerning God's dealings with Pharaoh. And if in these dealings he has recorded a testimony to his severity and rectitude, he has given us an equally striking manifestation of his

grace and sovereign mercy in his procedure towards Israel. Had he dealt with them as they had sinned, they too had perished; but he remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and, moreover, with all the unbelief and disobedience which were chargeable upon Israel as a people, there were among them those who constituted the true Church, and on whose behalf all God's mighty works were wrought. Very soon, therefore, did he give intimation to Israel of his purpose to deliver them, as well as of the way of that deliverance. Already Moses, as we have seen, was commanded to lift up his rod, and to stretch out his hand over the sea, and divide it; and we cannot doubt that the new animation and confidence which this command imparted to him would soon appear to the people, and go to revive their hearts also. But another, and a still more striking intimation of God's gracious purpose was immediately vouchsafed; for "the Angel of God, which went before the camp of Israel, removed and went behind them; and the pillar of the cloud went from before their face, and stood behind them: and it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel; and it was a cloud and darkness to them, but it gave light by night to these: so that the one came not near the other all the night."

This sublime movement of their heavenly Guide, at the same time that, by the divine power, exercised by means of the rod of Moses, the sea began to be opened up before the strong east wind, was no doubt a very plain and a very strong assurance that God was to conduct them through the midst of the sea; and that until the way was opened for them, He who neither slumbers nor sleeps would himself keep watch lest their enemies should break in upon them. And certainly, if mere evidence could convince or mere promises convert men, the Israelites would have had no hesitation in obeying the command to go forward. But Pharaoh, and even Israel themselves on some occasions, had disbelieved and rejected as plain intimations of God's purposes as these were; and if, therefore, the people of Israel did on this occasion believe and obey, it was because they received grace so to do of Him of whom it is said by the Holy Ghost, "Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth." To this grace we must ascribe the readiness of the people to obey Moses, when he commanded

them to go forward. For encouraging as were the intimations which they received respecting the way which God had purposed to provide for their escape,—and calculated as they were to reassure their hearts, and to reconcile them to what might otherwise have appeared a very inexplicable command,—the command to go forward,—still there was enough to terrify and prevent them from doing so, if their hope of passing the Red Sea in safety had rested on any thing else than the simple word of God;—especially as they had still another alternative, that of supplicating Pharaoh's forgiveness, and returning again to their former state of degrading servitude, and the debasing influence of idolatrous examples. We are told that when they went into the sea, the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand and on their left,—a state of things which could not have been produced, far less maintained, by natural causes, so as to give them confidence in venturing their lives upon it; for though it is said that a strong east wind was employed to divide the sea, it must have been for the purpose of intimating to Israel what was about to take place, rather than to give them confidence in it as sufficient of itself to produce such an effect,—it being inconceivable that the waters of the sea could have been so suspended by any such natural cause. The sight, too, of the waters thus elevated on their right hand and on their left, and of the mighty abyss into which they were to descend, appalling as it was in itself, must have been rendered still more sublime and terrific by the supernatural light which laid it open to their view,—even the light of that pillar of fire whereby God gave them intimation of his presence and his nearness to them. And besides all this, had their hope of passing the Red Sea in safety rested on any combination of natural causes, of which they thought that they might avail themselves, they could have had no assurance that Pharaoh might not avail himself of the same; nay, they would have had reason to believe that after placing themselves in the most perilous circumstances, they were as far as ever from escaping the danger which had compelled them to betake themselves to so desperate a resource. Their going forward, therefore, at the command of Moses, could only be the effect of a simple reliance on the word of God, wrought in them by the Spirit of God himself. But for that word, they had no security against

being either immediately overwhelmed, or pursued and overtaken by Pharaoh; and whatever, therefore, might be their unbelief on former or subsequent occasions, it was a very high act of faith on their part deliberately to place themselves in the mighty deep, where the waters were suspended on their right hand and on their left only by the unseen agency of a divine power.

Such was the issue of the memorable contest which the king of Egypt dared so long and so obstinately to maintain with the people of God: "and such," to use the words of an eminent divine, "will be the last end of the contest between the world and the Church. Their long conflict shall end in the complete salvation of the one, and the utter destruction of the other." That there has been in all ages, and will continue to be such a conflict, the Scriptures do everywhere assume, and experience does every day manifest; and though the issue at last cannot be doubtful, yet appearances do not always indicate growing strength and success on the side of the Church. Schemes formed for her advancement do sometimes seem to miscarry, while plans laid against her purity and peace do but too frequently succeed; and instead of subjugating the world to the obedience of Christ, how often does she herself bear a worldly aspect, by imbibing a worldly spirit, and acting upon worldly maxims! And to what is a low state of spiritual life and spiritual influence in the Church to be ascribed, but to the want of faith on her part,—that faith which purifieth the heart, worketh by love, and overcometh the world? The promises of God, whereon his people are commanded to rely, are still as full and as faithful as ever they were; and the manifestation of his glory is still inseparably connected with their salvation, and with the extension of Christ's cause in the world. But if they distrust the truth, or are blind to the extent of these promises,—if in forming schemes for propagating the knowledge of the truth, they do not feel assured that He who is for them is greater far than all that can be against them,—if they think it necessary to accommodate their principles and practice to the prevailing temper and spirit of the world,—and if they are placing in natural causes, and apparently favourable circumstances, the confidence which ought to be placed in the word and promise of

Him who is the faithful and true witness,—what can be expected but that their plans should prove abortive, that their efforts should become languid, and that the spiritual life should decay in their own souls? And as the faith of the Church collectively is the faith of individuals, it becomes Christians individually to inquire in what spirit they are seeking to overcome the many obstacles which oppose the extension of the kingdom of Christ, as well as their own advancement in the divine life. And the first subject of inquiry is, whether they have a clear and distinct apprehension of the ground of their own personal acceptance with God, and of their hope towards him as their Father to whom they are reconciled. It is evident, from the very nature of the thing, that where this first and great question is in an uncertain and unsettled state, there can be no strong confidence in any application which they make to God for aid in difficulty, or deliverance in time of trouble. The source of all the fear and faint-heartedness which Israel manifested was a doubt for the time whether God had really chosen them, and would fulfil in their experience the promises made to their fathers. And so it will be in the case of Christians generally. The more they are at rest on the great subject of their personal interest in the Covenant which secures, to all who believe, grace here and glory hereafter, the more confident will they be in asking divine aid in every time of perplexity,—the firmer will be their fortitude in resisting either the threatenings or the reproaches that would terrify them into the relinquishment of their principles, or an abandonment of their duty,—and the more enlarged will be their expectations of the ultimate triumph of the truth over all the opposition of its enemies. Gloomy as the prospects of the Church, as to the universal spread of the Gospel, may at times be, in consequence of abounding iniquity, whereby the love of many waxeth cold, they will be encouraged by remembering that the enemies of the Church in former times never appeared stronger or more formidable than at the moment when their strength was to be withered; and with regard to the conflict which they may individually be called to maintain, they cannot doubt that the same Almighty Power will disarm their spiritual adversary, or give them a full and final victory. The deliverance of Israel at the Red Sea does not, indeed, give to believers now the assurance

of such a redemption from temporal difficulties and dangers; because it is no longer by the accomplishment of some temporal object that God manifests his love and faithfulness to the Church. But all such trials will be to them, with respect to their heavenly inheritance, what the events at the Red Sea were to Israel in reference to the inheritance of Canaan,—they will be made to contribute to their more triumphant arrival there; and having peace, therefore, with God, through the Lord Jesus Christ, they will be ready, in all cases of difficulty, where the path of duty is clear, to receive and to obey the command, "Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward."

And there is one path which we must all tread, and in entering on which it does most deeply concern us to be prepared for receiving and cheerfully obeying this command,—I mean the path that leads through the valley of the shadow of death. To the true Christian, this, like every thing else in which the will of God is intimated to him, is the path of duty,—though the most difficult and trying. But whether we regard it as such or not, when the command to go forward comes, compliance will be with none of us a matter of choice. However reluctant, advance we must, be the termination what it may. And what, then, will sustain our spirits at such a moment,—the moment when we feel ourselves on the verge of an unseen world,—when the dimness of death is shutting out from our view for ever all that to us is dearest and loveliest on the earth; when, like Israel of old, we are about to descend into the abyss of solitude and darkness, where none, however willing, can accompany us; and when there comes upon our spirits the solemn impression that we are in a few moments to be conveyed into the presence of our Judge, and to open our eyes on the great realities of eternity? To the soul thus conscious of being beyond the aid of all created power, cut off as it were from all communion with created things, and engrossed with an exclusive sense of the presence of Him who filleth all in all,—to the soul that is brought to such an awful crisis as this, there is but one refuge,—the all-sufficiency of Christ. But it is a sure refuge to all who have fled thither. He is the good Shepherd, whose rod is a rod of great power, and of which that of Moses was but the type. Having laid down his life for his sheep, he is now exalted to reign for their behoof.

He is with them now, and he will stand by them at the last: and as amidst all their difficulties and trials they can say, "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want;" so they will be enabled to say, at the close of their pilgrimage, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."

XXVII.

THE SONG OF MOSES.

EXODUS XV. 1-18.

It appears that this sublime song, which was indited by Moses under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, was sung by the congregation of Israel, while yet they stood by the Red Sea, and saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea-shore. And from what is said of them at the conclusion of the preceding chapter, we cannot doubt that it was sung with feelings of the most profound reverence, as well as of admiration and gratitude. For we are there told that "Israel saw that great work which the Lord did upon the Egyptians: and the people feared the Lord, and believed the Lord, and his servant Moses." The terrible judgment which they saw executed, in the overthrow of Pharaoh and the flower of his army, when the noblest and bravest of his people, with himself at their head, were overwhelmed in the mighty waters, and their dead bodies were cast upon the shore, to be left there without any of the honours which Egypt was wont to confer on her illustrious dead,—this terrible judgment, viewed simply in itself, as the instantaneous destruction of a countless multitude of human beings, who, a moment before, were glorying in their strength, was fitted to awaken in the minds of the people of Israel a feeling of fear and of holy awe towards Him who had cast Pharaoh's chariots and his host into the sea, and drowned his chosen captains also in the Red Sea. And when they reflected that they themselves had passed in safety between

the walls of water, which at the bidding of Moses had returned to their strength, and buried in death the mightiest and most powerful of the chosen men of Egypt; we can conceive them looking back with fear and trembling on the perilous condition in which they had been placed during that eventful night, as men are wont to feel when looking back on some fearful danger which they have escaped. But when they further reflected that this immediate interposition of the hand of God against Pharaoh was on their behalf, and expressly for their deliverance, there could not fail to be awakened in their minds feelings of gratitude and childlike confidence. And, under the influence of these mingled sentiments, it would be a relief to their minds to break forth into a song,—to give utterance to the sentiments of adoration, gratitude, and praise, with which their hearts must have been filled. It has been truly and well remarked, by a pious commentator, that "singing is as much the language of holy joy as praying is of holy desire."

We can easily conceive, therefore, that the people of Israel, on emerging from the bosom of the Red Sea, and beholding the dead bodies of their inveterate foes, before whom they had fled trembling, cast out on the sea-shore, would be naturally inclined to give vent to their feelings of reverence, wonder, and thankfulness, in a song of praise. But how must these feelings have been excited, and with what energy must they have given utterance to them, when God himself, by his Holy Spirit, indited to them a song whereby to express their emotions! However natural it might have been for them so to acknowledge their obligations to God's redeeming mercy, they might have entertained some doubt whether it were an act of worship which would be acceptable to God. But all such doubt was removed when he himself put a new song in their mouth, even praise unto their God, and taught them to say,—"I will sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea. The Lord is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation: he is my God, and I will prepare him an habitation; my father's God, and I will exalt him."

This song, then, being of the Holy Spirit's inditing, will be found to express, as might be expected, the sentiments which it was most befitting the people of Israel to cherish on so memor-

able an occasion. The great sight which they saw, the appalling judgment of which they were eye-witnesses, was fitted, as I have already stated, to impress them with an awful sense of the majesty and greatness of God; and accordingly there runs through the whole song a strain of holy and devout awe,—the expression of profound reverence and godly fear. "Thy right hand, O Lord, is become glorious in power: thy right hand, O Lord, hath dashed in pieces the enemy. . . . . Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods? who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders? . . . . . The Lord shall reign for ever and ever." The sudden destruction of Pharaoh, at the very moment that he was glorying in his strength, and anticipating the full gratification of his revenge, was fitted to impress Israel with a lively apprehension of the feebleness of all human power when exercised against God; and accordingly we find them expressing in this song the almighty facility with which he can confound the schemes and wither the strength of those that rise up against him: "The enemy said, I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil; my lust shall be satisfied upon them; I will draw my sword, my hand shall destroy them. Thou didst blow with thy wind, the sea covered them: they sank as lead in the mighty waters." Further, Israel might conclude that the effect of the terrible judgment which they had witnessed would be to strike terror and dismay into the nations against whom they were commissioned to go up, and whose land they were to possess. And accordingly, we find them saying, "The people shall hear, and be afraid: sorrow shall take hold on the inhabitants of Palestina. Then the dukes of Edom shall be amazed; the mighty men of Moab, trembling shall take hold upon them; all the inhabitants of Canaan shall melt away." And finally, the Israelites might have seen, and could hardly fail to see, in the divine interposition which they had just experienced, a pledge of their triumph over all the difficulties which might oppose their progress towards the land of Canaan, and their final establishment there. And accordingly, we find them expressing in the strongest language their confidence in the victory which they were to gain over all opposition, and the fulfilment of all that God had promised to their fathers: "Fear and dread shall fall upon the inhabitants of Canaan; by the great-

ness of thine arm they shall be as still as a stone; till thy people pass over, O Lord, till the people pass over, which thou hast purchased."

These, it is obvious, were the sentiments which the great work that they had seen was fitted to awaken in the minds of the people of Israel; and which, for the time at least, we cannot doubt they were willing to cherish. But, in giving utterance to these sentiments, they were not merely expressing the hope and confidence which might, and ought to have been awakened by what they had witnessed of the mercy and mighty power of God. The song was put into their mouth by God himself. In so far, therefore, as it referred to the future, it was prophetical. It was a distinct renewal of the promise made unto the fathers, wherein God again pledged his truth and faithfulness, that, in spite of all opposition, he would bring them into the land which he had sworn to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them. The Israelites, indeed, might have inferred, from the great deliverance which had been wrought for them in the hour of their extremity, that a divine power would never fail to be forthcoming on their behalf, on every future occasion of need. But it was not on such a conclusion alone that their hope was left to rest. They were assured, by immediate communication from God, that it would be so: and while they looked back on what had actually been accomplished, even their own safe passage through the Red Sea, and could say, in the language of adoring wonder, "With the blast of thy nostrils the waters were gathered together, the floods stood upright as an heap, and the depths were congealed in the heart of the sea;" they could look forward to their establishment in Canaan as an event not less certain, though yet future, and say, "Thou shalt bring them in, and plant them in the mountain of thine inheritance, in the place, O Lord, which thou hast made for thee to dwell in; in the sanctuary, O Lord, which thy hands have established."

But the prophecy contained in this song, as well as the event which it celebrated, is of far more extended application than to the Church of that time,—the men of that generation. The deliverance of Israel at the Red Sea was typical, and the song before us was prophetic, of a still more glorious victory,—even the triumph of Christ when he was to spoil principalities and powers,

and make a show of them openly, triumphing over them in his cross. Indeed, the great event which is celebrated in this song may be regarded as more than typical of Christ's victory. It may be considered as forming part of that victory itself,—one in that series of events wherein he did himself directly interpose, and by which he prepared the way for the final establishment of his kingdom, on the overthrow of the kingdom of Satan. That it was Christ himself, he who from the beginning rejoiced in the habitable part of the earth, and whose delights were with the sons of men,—that it was he who wrought redemption for Israel at the Red Sea, is very evident from many intimations of Scripture. The apostle tells us plainly that it was Christ who conducted Israel through the wilderness,—a truth which is also clearly intimated in the titles given to the heavenly Guide in the Old Testament, where he is called "The Lord," "The Angel of the Lord," "The Messenger of the Covenant," "The Captain of the Lord's host,"—titles peculiarly significant, as setting forth the character and work of Christ as Mediator. It was Christ, then, who appeared to Moses in the burning bush, who went before Israel in the pillar of fire, and afterwards took up his abode in the Shechinah, or cloud of glory, in the tabernacle and temple; being from the beginning, "the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person." And to this heavenly Guide of Israel we find expressly ascribed the overthrow and destruction of their enemies at the Red Sea: for we are told, that, "in the morning watch, the Lord looked unto the host of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and of the cloud, and troubled the host of the Egyptians, and took off their chariot-wheels, that they drave them heavily: so that the Egyptians said, Let us flee from the face of Israel; for the Lord fighteth for them against the Egyptians."

The deliverance of Israel, therefore, was not merely typical of that great deliverance which was to be wrought out by Christ, when, in the fulness of time, he should be manifested to destroy the works of the devil. It was itself a part of his great undertaking. It was wrought out in his character of Mediator, and on behalf of his Church, and formed a very important part of that scheme which was carried on from the beginning, and by which preparation was made for the fulfilment in due time of

the great work which Christ had undertaken. It was, moreover, the surest pledge that could be given of the sure and certain accomplishment of that work. It was itself a very gracious interposition on behalf of Israel,—a very bright display of the divine favour towards them. But no such manifestation of the divine favour could ever have been vouchsafed to the children of men, if it had not been that Christ had undertaken to satisfy the divine law, so as to render the forgiveness of sinners compatible with the honour and rectitude of that law. This was not to be actually carried into effect till many generations after. But in terms of the everlasting covenant between the Father and the Son, the accomplishment of Christ's mediatorial work was so sure, so infallibly certain, that, even from the beginning, it took effect for the salvation of every one that believed, and for procuring, on behalf of the Church, all those deliverances and gracious communications with which we find the Old Testament Scriptures abounding.

The great work, then, which the Lord did upon the Egyptians, like every other interposition recorded in Scripture, necessarily implied the accomplishment in due time of Christ's work; and while it typified his victory over all his spiritual enemies, it furnished the surest pledge of that victory. And so the Church was taught to foretell in the sacred song before us; for not only did that song assure the believing Israelites that they should be brought into the land promised to their fathers, but it predicted that there God would choose a place where he was to take up his abode, a sanctuary which his hands should establish. This prediction continued to receive its fulfilment in the establishment of Israel in the land of promise; in the selection of Zion as the mountain of the Lord's inheritance; and in the erection of the temple there, which he condescended to make his habitation, the dwelling-place of the Lord of glory. And it was fully accomplished when Christ appeared,—when the Lord came suddenly to his temple,—and when the second house was honoured as the first had never been, even by the actual presence of God manifest in the flesh, in very deed dwelling with men on the earth. And in contemplating the great redemption which Christ came to accomplish, and has actually accomplished, may not, and ought not, the Church to adopt the song of

Moses, with still more enlarged views of its import than Israel of old could entertain, and therefore with feelings of still more profound admiration and gratitude? Whatever solemnity and holy awe the people of Israel might feel, in looking back on that terrible night, when they were pursued by their inveterate foes, and driven as it were into the fearful abyss of the mighty waters, —or whatever emotions of joyful wonder might fill their souls, when, at the dawn of day, they found themselves in a place of safety, and beheld their enemies overwhelmed in the waters which had been to them a wall of defence on the right hand and on the left,—the Church now has a still more glorious victory to celebrate, and one which is fitted to awaken still more profound feelings, both of holy awe and of joyful gratitude. For, could we conceive aright of the horrors of that awful hour, when Christ conflicted with, and conquered the powers of darkness, ere he bowed his head and gave up the ghost, enduring, at the same time, the infliction of the divine wrath on account of sin; how unspeakably more solemn would be our feelings of holy fear than were those of Israel, even on looking back on the appalling terrors of their journey through the Red Sea! And when we reflect for what purpose Christ did thus contend and conquer, how much more elevated should our feelings of admiration and gratitude be than those of Israel, even when they spake, saying, "I will sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea!"

The Church, then, can never want a subject calculated to awaken every feeling of admiration and gratitude even more powerfully than that of the sacred song before us. But the Church, I fear, has been but too prone to fall into something like indifference and insensibility, even though daily conversant with a theme the most interesting, and the most animating; and it has often happened that some new deliverance from calamities, rendered necessary by the Church's own backsliding and sin, has alone awakened those feelings of gratitude and praise, which, if not altogether extinguished, had become exceedingly cold. It was so with the Old Testament Church. Notwithstanding the ardour and apparent sincerity with which the people of Israel had sung the praises of God on the shore of the Red Sea, in a song of the Spirit's own inditing, we find them, in three short

days, murmuring against Him, whose gracious interposition they had celebrated in such lofty strains, and in whose faithfulness they had expressed such unqualified confidence. And so it has been in every subsequent age. As the great deliverance at the Red Sea did not so permanently affect the hearts of the people of Israel, as to reconcile them to every future trial which they encountered; so the still mightier deliverance which it typified, and for which it prepared the way, has not always exercised such an influence on the Church, as to prevent coldness, backsliding, and sin. But this very backsliding has afforded occasion for new manifestations of the forbearance, the mercy, and the faithfulness of God, in his dealings with his people. For a season he has left them to reap the bitter fruits of their forgetfulness of him, till, convinced of their folly and ingratitude, they returned to him by penitence and faith; and then he has never failed to visit them again in mercy and loving-kindness, enabling them to rejoice greatly in the hope of his salvation.

And, at such seasons, the Old Testament Church found comfort and encouragement in calling to mind the very deliverance referred to in the passage under consideration. Often do we find the Psalmist speaking of it in express terms, and in such a way as to imply that the recollection of that deliverance ministered largely to the consolation and encouragement of God's people, as often as they were in a penitent and humble frame of spirit, or were alive to the value of the spiritual blessings which were secured to them by the Abrahamic Covenant. Nay, he makes that deliverance a ground whereon to rest his plea for a divine interposition for the Church in the time of trouble; as if, by delivering Israel at the Red Sea, God had pledged his truth and faithfulness that divine help would never be wanting to them in any future time of need. "O God," says he, "how long shall the adversary reproach? shall the enemy blaspheme thy name for ever? Why withdrawest thou thy hand, even thy right hand? pluck it out of thy bosom. For God is my king of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth. Thou didst divide the sea by thy strength; thou brakest the heads of the dragons in the waters. Thou brakest the heads of leviathan in pieces, and gavest him to be meat to the people inhabiting the wilderness." "The waters saw thee, O God, the waters saw thee; they

were afraid; the depths also were troubled." And in like manner, when, in seasons of gladness and spiritual joy, the Psalmist enumerated the wondrous works of the Lord, this deliverance at the Red Sea occupied a prominent place: "He rebuked the Red Sea also, and it was dried up; so he led them through the depths, as through the wilderness.....And the waters covered their enemies; there was not one of them left. Then believed they his words; they sang his praise."

The song of Moses, then, was in substance the song of the Old Testament Church in every subsequent age, whether they sought to have their hope revived, and their hearts reassured towards God, in seasons of depression and darkness,—or whether, in times of spiritual joy and gladness, they gave utterance to their feelings in reckoning up the wonderful things which God had done for them. And in substance it has been, and will be, the song of the Church even in Gospel times; inasmuch as it celebrates an event at once preparatory to, and typical of, the great redemption which Christ purchased by his death, and which, from the beginning, has been, and ever will be, the real subject of the gratitude and praise of the Church.

But there is one circumstance which renders the song of Moses equally appropriate in the mouth of the people of God in all ages. It celebrates a deliverance which was so palpably and so exclusively the doing of God, that there was no room for any other claim than his own to the honour and glory of doing it. And this circumstance conveys much wholesome instruction to the Church. Many have been the divine interpositions on behalf of the cause of truth and righteousness since the period here referred to, and many the deliverances which the people of God have experienced: but not a few of these have been wrought out by the instrumentality of human agents, directed and controlled by the overruling providence of God; and believers have been but too prone to ascribe to these agents what belonged only to God himself, and moreover, have been led to put that trust in the wisdom of human counsels, and in the help of human strength, which should be placed only in the grace and power of Him who is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working,—who exercises a most holy, wise, and powerful control over all his creatures, and all their actions,—who destroyeth the wisdom of the wise,

and bringeth to nothing the understanding of the prudent,—who maketh the wrath of man to praise him, and restraineth the remainder of his wrath.

It may be for this reason that the subject of the song before us, even the deliverance of Israel at the Red Sea, is so frequently referred to in Scripture as a striking display of the absolute sovereignty of God,—and fitted, therefore, to remind the Church that all other agents are as entirely under his control, and at his disposal, as was the strong east wind which separated the waters of the Red Sea. But whatever be the design, it is a remarkable fact that this event, as well as the song in which it was celebrated, does occupy a very prominent place in Scripture. Not only is it frequently mentioned, as has already been seen, among the wondrous doings of the Lord; but, in reference to the glory of the latter days, we find the prophet speaking of it as if it were to be a transacting over again of the passage of Israel through the midst of the sea: "Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord: awake, as in the ancient days, in the generations of old. Art thou not it that hath cut Rahab, and wounded the dragon? Art thou not it which hath dried the sea, the waters of the great deep; that hath made the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over? Therefore the redeemed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing unto Zion: and everlasting joy shall be upon their head: they shall obtain gladness and joy; and sorrow and mourning shall flee away." And even in heaven itself the redeemed of the Lord are represented as singing "the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb."

XXVIII.

THE SABBATH.

EXODUS XVI. 29, 30.

WHEN the Lord intimated to Moses his gracious purpose of raining bread from heaven for the people of Israel, he gave commandment that on the sixth day they should gather twice as much as they gathered daily. The object of this command was to provide food for them on the seventh day, or the Sabbath, when no manna was to be found ; and it appears that the people generally understood and acted upon the instructions which they received ; for "it came to pass," we are told, "that on the sixth day they gathered twice as much bread" as on other days, namely, "two omers for one man." There were, however, some exceptions to this general compliance with the divine command, as we find in regard to another also connected with the manna ; and both strikingly illustrative of the perverseness, and impious distrust of the divine faithfulness, which characterized no small portion of the people of Israel.

We are told, at the 19th verse, that Moses said, "Let no man leave of it till the morning,"—a command which involved a promise, that every morning would assuredly bring with it a fresh supply of food for the day ; "Notwithstanding," it is added, "they hearkened not unto Moses ; but some of them left of it until the morning, and it bred worms, and stank : and Moses was wroth with them." And no wonder that he was wroth ; for they who acted in opposition to his command did very plainly

declare that they could not trust the divine promise, and that, having food in their hands which was more than a supply for the day, they would, by their own care and skill, provide for the wants of the morrow, as a surer way than relying on the divine faithfulness, of preventing a recurrence of the privation which they endured when they said to Moses and Aaron, "Ye have brought us forth into this wilderness, to kill this whole assembly with hunger." But having been experimentally taught, by the corruption of the store which they had hoarded up, how vain and foolish at least, if not how sinful, it was to attempt securing a supply of their wants in a way directly opposed to the revealed will of God, it might have been supposed that they would not again manifest the same distrust, in connection, at least, with the same subject. And yet, on the very next occasion, they betrayed the same faithlessness, in a way the opposite, indeed, of the former, but not less unreasonable and perverse; for when they were commanded to gather, on the sixth day, twice as much as they were wont to gather on other days,—a command which necessarily implied a promise, that what they laid up for the seventh day, or the Sabbath, would not become corrupt and unfit for use,—some of them did, nevertheless, go out to gather on the seventh day; thereby as plainly declaring as in the former case that they did not credit the divine word, and would not, in obedience to that word, submit to the labour of laying up what might at last prove, as they virtually alleged, altogether useless.

To some, perhaps, the conduct of Israel, on this occasion, may appear so unreasonable and foolish, to say nothing of its impiety, as to have no parallel but in that of wayward children, who are not to be reasoned with, or reconciled to any thing. And yet is it not, after all, only a very palpable exemplification of that forgetfulness of God, or distrust of his promise, which is natural to all men, and with which even Christians themselves are but too frequently chargeable? For how often will it be found, that, in making provision for future necessities, men do, in reality, reckon for success on their own skill and strength, even though ready, it may be, to acknowledge, in words, their entire dependence on the providence of God? Their seeking to make such provision may not be contrary to the revealed will of God;

and the means employed for doing so may, in themselves, be perfectly lawful; but, were their state of mind and feeling clearly disclosed, it might be found that there is in their heart as little of a recognition of God's sovereignty, and of reliance on his promise, as in the case of Israel when, in openly-avowed distrust of that promise, and in direct disobedience to a divine command, they hoarded up the manna. They may be in the habit, perhaps, of giving utterance to the petition, "Give us this day our daily bread," and yet their main confidence may all the while be placed in their own wisdom and energy,—or, perhaps, in a vague hope that some fortunate events may occur to bring about the object of their wishes, even the increase of their worldly comforts. And in so far, then, as they act on this principle, they are chargeable with the very sin which was so palpable in the case of Israel, and for which they were reproved in the context, "How long refuse ye to keep my commandments and my laws?"

But the transgression of Israel here referred to was greatly aggravated, inasmuch as it involved disobedience to another divine command, which amounted to the profanation of a divine ordinance,—the desecration of the Sabbath which the Lord had sanctified: "See, for that the Lord hath given you the Sabbath, therefore he giveth you on the sixth day the bread of two days." The simple command that, on the sixth day, they should gather twice as much manna as they gathered daily, and moreover, that they should prepare it for the following day, was a repetition, in very expressive and emphatic terms, of the appointment of the seventh day as the Sabbath, or a day of holy rest. I say, a repetition of that appointment; for the original institution was coeval with creation itself, inasmuch as "on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it;" that is, set it apart to an holy use. The institution of the Sabbath did thus take place while man was in a state of innocence; when the exercise of all the faculties of his soul, and of all the powers of his body, was unaccompanied with painful weariness; and when, at the end of six days, he did, after the example, as he was made in the image, of his Creator, rest from his labour, contemplating

the wonders of creation, and looking back without remorse or regret on his own works, enjoying, in the measure and degree of which his limited, but sinless nature was capable, the very blessedness of God himself, when "he rested and was refreshed."

But that the Sabbath was instituted with a view also to man's fallen state, is abundantly evident from the passage before us, and the whole subsequent history of the Church. We do not, indeed, find, in the Scripture history of the period from the fall to the time referred to in this chapter, any express mention made of the observance of the Sabbath by the people of God. But it does not follow that it was not observed. For on the same ground it might be alleged that none of the patriarchs in their prayers pleaded the first and the great promise,—the promise which carried in its bosom all subsequent promises,—the seed of the woman shall bruise the head of the serpent, because we have no record of their having so prayed. On the same ground it might be alleged, that the patriarchs knew nothing of the heavenly inheritance, or of the great Atonement whereby an entrance into that inheritance was to be secured, because we do not find them expressly referring to either. But that they both knew and pleaded the first promise,—that they saw, in the sacrifices which they offered, types both of the reality and the efficacy of the great Atonement,—and that, in the promises of God, they found a foretaste of the rest which remaineth for the people of God,—is plainly asserted by Christ himself and his apostles. Our Lord said to the Jews of his time, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it, and was glad." And the apostle has said, not of Abraham only, but of the other patriarchs, that they "all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth," desiring "a better country, that is an heavenly."

The absence, then, of any express mention of the observance of the Sabbath, previous to the arrival of Israel in the wilderness, is no proof whatever that the Sabbath was not observed. A book which contains, within the compass of a few pages, the history of the world for two thousand five hundred years, cannot record a minute detail of the practices of the Church, or any-

thing more than such circumstances in the character and conduct of God's people as are sufficient to show that they lived by faith on his promises, and in obedience to his commandments. But the passage before us furnishes, I think, abundant evidence that the institution of the Sabbath was known to the people of Israel as an old institution. It is probable, indeed, that during their sojourn in Egypt it might in a great measure, if not altogether, have ceased to be observed by them; for not only were they exposed to the blighting influence of idolatry around them, but they were slaves, the bond-servants of cruel taskmasters, who would care little for their conscientious scruples about profaning the day which their fathers had taught them to hold sacred. But the command to gather on the sixth day twice as much as they gathered daily, and to prepare it according to their various tastes, so as to be ready for use on the seventh day,—this command, I say, is introduced in such a way, and expressed in such terms, as plainly to intimate that the ordinance of the Sabbath, however much it might have been neglected, was not a new or unheard-of ordinance. The command given to Moses was very simple; for when the Lord said to him, "Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you," he added, "and it shall come to pass, that on the sixth day they shall prepare that which they bring in; and it shall be twice as much as they gather daily." In this command it was plainly assumed, or taken for granted, that the people knew for what purpose the command was given; and, accordingly, without any farther explanation, it is afterwards said, "And it came to pass, that on the sixth day they gathered twice as much bread, two omers for one man." It is true, that the rulers of the congregation, when they saw the people preparing to lay up food for the morrow, came to Moses and told him what was going on, as if they were in doubt whether the people were right in so doing. But it is plain, I think, that their report to Moses implied nothing more than that they did not fully understand how the Sabbath was to be sanctified, and to what extent the people were to abstain from labour on that day,—a state of ignorance that was easily to be accounted for from the circumstances in which Israel had been placed for two hundred and fifteen years. Accordingly, Moses explained more fully the manner of sanctifying the Sabbath, but still in such a

way as to imply that he was only reviving an old, not instituting a new ordinance. Those of the people, therefore, who neglected, or refused to lay up, on the sixth day, a provision for the morrow, did not only disobey an express command,—thereby avowing their distrust of an explicit promise,—but, by going out on the seventh day to gather manna, profaned a divine ordinance, and rebelled against a renewed enforcement of the law of the Sabbath, as if it had been an infringement on their rights and privileges. It appears that their sin was not on that occasion visited, as it afterwards was, by the infliction of death; but it drew down upon them the solemn reproof, "How long refuse ye to keep my commandments and my laws?"

But the sin here reproved was still further aggravated, inasmuch as it involved a marked contempt of a privilege of inestimable value. And this is the point of view in which the passage under consideration is designed to place it: "See, for that the Lord hath given you the Sabbath, therefore he giveth you on the sixth day the bread of two days;" as if he had said, Because God has given you a day of holy rest, therefore, in order that you may enjoy that rest without distraction of mind or outward disturbance, he has given you on the sixth day the bread of two days. How far the people of Israel understood and estimated the spiritual blessings of which the Sabbath was at once a type and a pledge, we cannot determine. But with the clearer and more extended revelation which we now possess, we can be at no loss to see what these blessings were. They were in substance the same before and after the fall. To Adam, in a state of innocence, the Sabbath must have been a very precious season, during which he enjoyed rest with God,—that rest which is represented as the blessedness of the Almighty Creator himself when he contemplated his finished works, and with infinite complacency and satisfaction pronounced them very good. It was a confirmation of the covenant which God condescended to make with man, wherein he promised him eternal life, or rest with himself, on condition of perfect obedience,—plainly intimating, that in the event of his yielding that obedience, he should participate, so far as his nature was capable, in God's rest, —even the eternal enjoyment of fellowship with the fountain of light, and life, and blessedness. By his fall, man did indeed

forfeit this happiness, and, therefore, was no longer entitled to the outward pledge of it. But God having, in his infinite grace and mercy, entered into a covenant with the Redeemer for the salvation of a Church from among our fallen and ruined race, whereby there was secured for them the rest which they had forfeited, was pleased still to vouchsafe to them the Sabbath as at once a type and a pledge of that rest.

In the case of the Jews, indeed,—the Church under the Mosaic economy,—the command to keep holy the Sabbath, embodied in the moral law as delivered from Mount Sinai, was calculated, like every other commandment of that law, to bring them under the spirit of bondage to the fear of the awful penalty by which it was sanctioned. For the moral law, as uttered by the voice, and afterwards written by the finger of God, viewed in itself, apart from the promise of a Saviour, was a renewal of the Covenant of Works, requiring obedience on pain of death. Israel, indeed, were not placed absolutely under the Covenant of Works, so as that their eternal condition was to be determined by their fulfilling or not fulfilling its requirements; for had that been their condition, they would have been utterly without hope. They had relief from its burden, a refuge from its rigour, in the promise originally made to our first parents, and afterwards renewed to Abraham; and all who believed that promise became heirs of eternal life,—they entered into God's rest. But the law was given to them, and in the form of a covenant, for important ends. "It was added," the apostle says, "because of transgressions,"—it was "our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ,"—convicting men of guilt, and convincing them of their helplessness,—and so shutting them up to the faith of the Gospel, by which alone they could be justified.

Its effect, therefore, was to engender a spirit of bondage, from which they could find no relief or enlargement but by betaking themselves to the promise, and to those types of Christ and of his mediatorial work in which that promise was embodied. And the fourth commandment, like every other, had the effect of thus producing a servile frame of spirit, inasmuch as it was included under the general sanction, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." Still, the Sabbath was a type and a pledge of the rest

that remaineth for the people of God; and, as such, it occupies a very prominent place in the Old Testament Scriptures. Nor can we doubt that when believers, under the conviction of sin, and the feeling of helplessness which the law awakened, turned for refuge to the promise, in the faith of which Abraham lived in hope and died in peace, they would find in the observance of the Sabbath a foretaste of that eternal rest to which they were taught to look forward. And so it must especially have been at the period referred to in this passage, ere yet the law was given: so that they who disobeyed the command to prepare for the day of rest were not only chargeable with violating an express precept and profaning a divine ordinance, but were guilty of setting at nought a privilege of incalculable value.

But it is under the Gospel dispensation that the grace of God in the institution of the Sabbath, as in every thing else, is fully and clearly manifested. When first instituted, it was annexed to the Covenant of Works, directing man to seek, and assuring him that he would find his rest, his satisfying portion, in God,—in the contemplation of his works, and the enjoyment of his fellowship. Through sin this rest was forfeited and lost; and though in the eternal counsels of God a way of recovering it had been found out and determined on, yet for many ages this counsel of peace was but partially and dimly revealed; and the ordinance of the Sabbath, as we have already seen, did in like manner but imperfectly represent or typify the rest of which it was a pledge, in consequence of the peculiar dispensation under which the Church was placed. In the fulness of time the purpose of God was clearly revealed, being accomplished in the mediatorial work of Christ,—a work so transcendently glorious, and unfolding so marvellous a manifestation of the divine perfections, that creation itself, from which God rested, and in the contemplation of which he was refreshed, is spoken of as if it were its type and figure. Christ having humbled himself to take upon him our nature,—to tabernacle for a season among men,—to pour out his soul an offering for sin,—and to be laid for a time in the grave,—did rise again from the dead, and, looking on the work which he had finished, and which his Father had given him to do, he rested and was refreshed. He saw of the travail of his soul and was satisfied. Well has it been said, that "as of old God commanded

light to shine out of darkness, whereby we might see and behold his glory, which he had implanted, and was implanting on the work of his hands; so now he shines into our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of his glory in the face of Jesus Christ." And could any thing, therefore, be more befitting,—more worthy of God,—more in accordance with the whole tenor of his righteous, as well as gracious administration, than to make the day on which Christ as Mediator rested from his work,—even the work of a new creation,—the moral and spiritual regeneration of fallen creatures,—and was refreshed;—to make this day, I say, the pledge and foretaste of eternal rest to his redeemed people?

It is impossible, I think, for those who have read the Old Testament Scriptures, with any degree of spiritual discernment, to avoid seeing therein enough to prepare them for the change of the day of rest from the seventh to the first day of the week, on the completion of the work of Christ. When God had finished the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, and had pronounced them very good, he rested, and he sanctified the seventh day as a memorial of his infinite wisdom, unbounded beneficence, and creating power,—as well as a pledge to man that he should participate in the same rest. And when Christ at his resurrection had finished a work which was ultimately to rectify all the disorder which sin had wrought, not only in the natural constitution of this world, but in the moral nature of man,—a work, too, which was not effected merely by the utterance of a word of power, which was all that was necessary for creating the world, but which required the incarnation, sufferings, and death of the only-begotten and well-beloved Son of God;—when Christ, I say, had finished this work on behalf of his redeemed people, and was declared to have done so by his resurrection from the dead, could any thing be expected but that the Sabbath, which was originally a memorial of creation, would be appointed a memorial of redemption,—that great work in which the attributes and perfections of God are revealed with a fulness and a glory in which all the wonders of creation could never have revealed them? And the devout reader of the Scriptures will find that the New Testament fully accords with these anticipations. The apostles and other primitive Christians observed the first day of the week as the day of rest, the Lord's

Day, just as if it had been a matter of course, without any positively expressed precept on the subject; and in the writings of the evangelists and apostles, we find such allusions made to the work of creation, in the way of illustrating Christ's work of redemption, as represent the former not only as subservient, which, of course, it necessarily was, but also as subordinate to the latter. The Lord's Day, then, is essentially what the Sabbath has always been,—a type and pledge of rest with God,—a participation in the very blessedness of God as Creator and of Christ as Redeemer,—that rest which includes every thing that is necessary to constitute the perfect and permanent happiness of immortal creatures,—the rest which remaineth for the people of God.

How sacred, then, as well as precious should the Sabbath, or Lord's Day, be to us who live under the Gospel dispensation! It is as sacred as ever it was, though not now guarded, as of old, by the solemn sanction of temporal penalties in every individual case of transgression; for the very law of our creation requires us to devote some portion of our time to the immediate service or worship of God, and the whole tenor of the divine administration points out one day in seven as the portion so required. It is by hallowing that day, or keeping it holy, that we commemorate alike the wonders of creating power, and the excelling glory of redeeming grace; and to refuse, therefore, or to neglect the observance of it as a day which God has reserved for himself, and will not give to another, is virtually to declare that we see nothing either in the work of creation, or in the still more marvellous work of redemption, that is worthy of being solemnly celebrated by one day of rest in seven, even though enforced by the example of God himself. But the authoritative command of God, the positive institution of the Sabbath as a day of rest from worldly labour, and a day devoted to the immediate worship of God, the contemplation of his works, and the enjoyment of his fellowship, is not the only consideration which goes to render the Sabbath the most interesting of all days. It ought to be as precious to us as it is sacred. It is not now enjoined on us as it was on Israel of old, when the fourth commandment was delivered from Mount Sinai, forming part of the moral law, as a renewal in substance of the Covenant of Works, calculated and designed to generate a spirit of bondage, and to shut them up to

the promise, as that alone in which they could find peace, or could see in the Sabbath a type and pledge of that rest which the law could not give them. Christ has now been revealed, the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth; and the Christian Sabbath is a memorial not only of creation, but of redemption,—a pledge that as Christ has entered into his rest, so his believing people shall be made partakers of the same.

It is only in so far as the Sabbath is thus felt to be at once a pledge and a foretaste of the rest which is emphatically called God's rest, that it is really sanctified or kept holy. Men may be awed by the many solemn things which are said in Scripture of the guilt of profaning God's holy day, so as to yield an outward respect to the ordinance of the Sabbath, by abstaining from their ordinary avocations, and by formally engaging in those acts of religious worship which constitute the appropriate and appointed exercises of that day. But if they do not seek to hold fellowship with God in these exercises,—if it is not their earnest desire and their great concern to find rest unto their souls in the believing contemplation of the finished work of Christ,—if they feel no interest, and experience no pleasure, in meditating on the wonders of that creation in the review of which the Almighty Creator himself rested and was refreshed, and on that marvellous scheme of redemption in the execution of which Christ sees of the travail of his soul and is satisfied,—if, in one word, they are not anxious to have their state of mind and feeling on these great subjects brought into accordance with the mind of God, so that the Sabbath may be to them an anticipation of that eternal Sabbath to which they professedly look forward,—then, however rigorous may be their outward observances, they make no approach to the sanctification of God's holy day.

I do not speak of any precise amount of spiritual enjoyment which they may find in the exercises of the Lord's Day; for many devout Christians may have to lament that their comfort on that day is sadly broken in upon by the intrusion of worldly thoughts, and the distracting influence of worldly cares. But wherever right apprehensions of the nature and design of the Lord's Day are entertained, the great concern will be to have the mind brought into such a frame as that to which I have now referred. And what then are we to infer from a survey of this pro-

fessedly Christian country, but that vast multitudes neither hope for nor desire a participation in that rest of which the Sabbath is designed to be at once the type and the pledge? For how many are there who, if they do not openly avow the sentiment, show by their conduct, at least, that they consider the Lord's Day as an encroachment on their worldly avocations,—a season which might be more profitably spent in the pursuit of worldly gains, or more pleasantly occupied in the enjoyment of worldly gratifications. I need hardly remind true Christians, that all the arguments which have been advanced for the purpose of showing that the Sabbath, in the phrase of this busy age, is lost time,—so much deducted from the industry of the country,—a dead loss to the community,—are exposed and refuted by the simple statement in this chapter: "See, for that the Lord hath given you the Sabbath, therefore he giveth you on the sixth day the bread of two days." It is true that this statement does not literally hold in regard to God's manner of dealing with men now; for he does not miraculously interpose to compensate for what may be the supposed loss of labour on the seventh day. But all true Christians must be persuaded that there is such a compensation secured in the providence of God: and it were not difficult to show,—indeed it has been proved beyond all controversy, by the investigations of enlightened Christian patriots,—that the Sabbath, as a day of rest from worldly labour, is as beneficial to the temporal interests, as it is necessary for the spiritual well-being of the community; and that though there had been no divine ordination on the subject, it would have been the highest wisdom of legislators to have appointed such a day, even in respect to the worldly prosperity of a nation.

But I fear it is not by those only who, on the pretext of adding to the fruits of national industry, and consequently, as they imagine, increasing the amount of national comfort, would convert the day of rest into a day of labour, that the Sabbath is desecrated as a divine ordinance, and despised as an invaluable privilege. There are many, I fear, who, though they would not go this length, are forward enough to encroach upon its sacredness, and ingenious enough, moreover, in getting up arguments whereby to justify their doing so, on the ground that the worldly objects which engage their attention are necessary, and that the

worldly recreations in which they indulge are lawful. All such pleas and arguments do but too plainly indicate a state of mind and feeling very different from that of the man who reverences the Sabbath as a divine ordinance, and who is anxious to find in it a pledge and earnest of an eternal, holy rest in God. They who are anxious thus to know how far they may go in worldly business or amusement, without incurring the guilt of violating the sanctity of the Lord's Day, do virtually declare that they regard that day as a painful restraint,—as unreasonably circumscribing their liberty; and they can never, therefore, have experimentally known it to be a blessed privilege. With those who have so known it, it will ever be the question, not to what extent they may safely indulge in worldly pursuits and recreations, but how they may most effectually shut out all those objects of interest and amusement that would unfit them for devoutly meditating on the wonderful works of God, and for enjoying fellowship with him; and it is only in so far as they have succeeded in doing so that they will regard themselves as having spiritually rested on the Sabbath day.

And to such persons, the fearful extent to which, even in this professedly Christian country, the Sabbath is openly desecrated, will be a source of the deepest sorrow and concern. Not only are there multitudes who, with a form of godliness,—with something like a Christian profession,—contrive, under some of the pretexts to which I have already referred, to appropriate to their worldly interest or entertainment the greater portion of that day which God specially claims as his own, and gives graciously back to us to be enjoyed in holy fellowship with himself,—but countless multitudes who openly make it the day of all others whereon to indulge in gratifications which are at all times and in all circumstances ungodly. It is impossible for Christians,—for those who have in any measure or degree practically known the value of the Sabbath,—to contemplate such a state of things but with the deepest commiseration for the unhappy individuals themselves, and with anxious alarm for the community in which such iniquity abounds; for the whole history of God's dealings with the nations where his Word has been known testifies that he will assert the authority of his own institution, and visit with righteous judgment the profanation of his holy day. And the

anxiety of Christians may be greatly increased by the apparent hopelessness of devising any effectual means for remedying an evil already so formidable, and which, I fear, is in many directions still growing. But they must not despond, nor be so discouraged as to relax their efforts for arresting the progress of so ruinous a calamity. Already have the united energies of Christians been called forth in various ways for remedying the terrible evil of Sabbath desecration,—and to a great extent the blessing of God has accompanied these. Let Christians, then, be encouraged to persevere in the employment of all legitimate means for discountenancing and putting down all the practices which involve a violation of the fourth commandment. Let them bear their testimony, on all befitting occasions, against the public profanation of the Lord's Day, by whomsoever or from whatever quarter such profanation may be sanctioned or countenanced. Let them so conduct their own affairs, and so manage the concerns of their households, as plainly to show to all over whom they have any influence that they revere as holy the Sabbath of the Lord. And, especially, let them seek to have a larger experience of the value of the Sabbath as a privilege,—as a season of spiritual refreshment to their own souls; for in proportion as they feel it to be precious, they will commiserate the unhappy condition of those who either willingly, or under the sore pressure of temptation, barter that privilege for ungodly pleasures or worldly gain,—and they will be thus excited to more vigorous and persevering efforts to arrest an evil by which innumerable immortal souls are ruined and undone. The contest, indeed, may, humanly speaking, appear hopeless, when they see the power and influence that are arrayed against them,—when the legislature itself either deliberately, or from culpable negligence, gives the sanction of law to the desecration of the Lord's Day. But let Christians remember that if God has denounced his righteous judgment against those who profane his ordinances, he has also declared that them that honour him and his ordinances he will honour; and this he may be pleased to do by hearing the prayers and blessing the efforts of those who esteem the Sabbath holy of the Lord and honourable, and may, in answer to these prayers, avert his threatened judgments, turning us as a people from our sins, himself turning from the fierceness of his anger.

XXIX.

THE SMITTEN ROCK.

EXODUS XVII. 5, 6.

THE miracle here recorded is specially referred to by the apostle Paul, as implying a great deal more than merely furnishing one example among many of the divine beneficence towards Israel, in bearing with their provocations and supplying their temporal necessities. In the 10th chapter of his first Epistle to the Corinthians, he thus writes: "Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and did all eat the same spiritual meat; and did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them; and that Rock was Christ."

We have thus the express authority of the apostle for considering the rock in Horeb, smitten by the rod of Moses, and sending forth water for the refreshment of the people of Israel, as a type of Christ and of the blessings of his salvation. Independently, indeed, of any such special notice, we should naturally have been led, and, I think, authorised by the general statements of Scripture, so to consider it. Christ himself spoke of what was written in the law of Moses, and in the Prophets, and in the Psalms concerning him, in such a way as to imply, that in all these departments of Scripture he was the grand subject, and that to the illustration of his mediatorial work all

the divine dispensations were designed to be subservient. We find him referring to certain circumstances and events in the history of Israel,—as, for example, the manna and the brazen serpent,—and expressly declaring that they typified or prefigured him and his salvation; thereby furnishing us with a key wherewith to unlock the treasures of heavenly knowledge contained in other portions of that history. And the apostle says generally of these things which happened unto Israel, that they are "for ensamples," or types, and are "written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come."

On these grounds, then, we might have concluded that the miracle here recorded was intended to foreshadow Christ,—more especially as we find innumerable passages of Scripture in which the blessings of his salvation are set forth under the emblem of water. But the apostle has done more than merely confirm the inference that might have been drawn from the general tenor of the doctrine and language of Scripture. He has singled out the miracle here recorded as specially fitted to set forth very vividly the freeness, the fulness, the rich abundance of the grace that is treasured up in Christ; and has plainly intimated, moreover, that it does most nearly concern believers to know, and to understand, and deeply to ponder, the import of God's dealing with Israel on the occasion referred to in the passage we are now considering: "I would not that ye should be ignorant," says he, "that all our fathers .... did drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them; and that Rock was Christ." And this language, be it remembered, was addressed not only to Jews, the descendants of those who drank of the water which issued from the rock in Horeb, but also to Gentile converts, who could have no personal interest, no hereditary feeling of gratification, in the transaction here recorded, except in so far as it conveyed instruction important to believers of all times. Even with regard to Israel, the apostle calls the rock a spiritual Rock, and the water that issued from it spiritual drink.

To a vast number of them, I fear, the miracle was valuable merely as satisfying a very urgent craving,—as a comfort which they were entitled to demand and expect, and for which no peculiar manifestation of gratitude was due. And even in regard to

those who longed for something better than the mere supply of bodily wants, their perception of the import of the miracle must have been very partial and imperfect, compared with what we may now see in it, by the light which has been thrown on all the types and predictions of the Old Testament Scriptures, as fulfilled in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. Still, the rock in Horeb was to them a spiritual Rock, and the water that flowed from it was spiritual drink; for the Rock was Christ. And whatever might be the extent to which they foresaw therein the person, and character, and work of the promised Seed, we cannot doubt that it conveyed to them both comfort and refreshment unspeakably more grateful than the mere satisfaction of their natural thirst. It was to them a new proof, and a very impressive one, that God was a full and satisfying portion,—that his favour was life, and his loving-kindness better than life,—that he never could forget, and never would forsake them,—that he would abundantly satisfy them with the fatness of his house, and make them drink of the river of his pleasure. If they did not see so clearly as believers now see, the fountain from which this river flows, they had the advantage of miraculous and sensible manifestations of the divine favour, from which they did assuredly gather that the relation in which they stood to God as their God, their shield, and their exceeding great reward, was a permanent, an eternal relation. And if believers in these last days can discover a depth of meaning in this, and in other Scripture types, which was altogether beyond the reach of the Old Testament Church, it is in perfect harmony with the principles of the divine administration in other matters, whereby every succeeding generation enjoys, or may enjoy, benefits unknown to the former, and according to which the divine purposes are unfolded gradually, and often very slowly. In fact, it could not be otherwise, but that the Church in later times should enjoy a clearer light, and larger discoveries in regard to the scheme of redemption, than were enjoyed in the earlier ages, unless Christ had appeared to carry into effect, as soon as it was foretold, the great work of bruising the serpent's head,—destroying the works of the devil. But how greatly does this consideration add to the responsibility of those who live in these last days, for the improvement of their clearer light; and how solemn should be the declaration

of the apostle, that "all these things are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come!"

Let us consider, then, some of the points of view in which Christ and the blessings of his salvation are here typically set forth. And the first, the leading idea naturally suggested by the passage we are considering, is, that as the rock was smitten by the rod of Moses the lawgiver, so Christ was smitten by the curse of the broken law, when it pleased the Lord to bruise him and put him to grief, making his soul an offering for sin. The necessity of Christ being so smitten is everywhere expressly asserted or plainly assumed in all that the Scriptures state concerning the plan of redemption, from the first promise of a Saviour downward,—a necessity arising out of the perfections of the divine character, and the unalterable principles of the divine government. If the mere exercise of love and compassion for sinners on the part of God could consistently have passed by their guilt and remitted its punishment, there was assuredly enough to have done so; for how inconceivably profound must that love have been which prompted him to give up his only-begotten and well-beloved Son unto the death! Had that love been less profound, had it been other than divine, man must have perished, without hope, in his sin. But divine, infinite as it was, it could not pass by sin unexpiated or unpunished. A propitiation was necessary for declaring God's righteousness, as well as his mercy, in the remission of sins,—for showing that he is just in justifying the ungodly; and Christ having undertaken to be that propitiation, it behoved him to suffer. That he did undertake it was an act of sovereign grace, the dictate of divine love. But having done so, having become the Surety of sinners in covenant with the Father, his engagement could only be fulfilled by standing in their place, and enduring the penalty which they had incurred. And hence the prominence which is everywhere given in Scripture to the sufferings of Christ. They form, in fact, the grand subject of revelation. They are described in every variety of language, and set forth in every form of type and figure,—not merely for the purpose of explaining the great principles of the divine government, and showing how it is that God can be the just God and yet the Saviour, but obviously with the view of reaching the hearts and the consciences of men; exhibit-

ing, on the one hand, the evil and deformity of sin, and unfolding, on the other, the unsearchable riches of divine grace.

Amidst the various subjects of deep interest and importance which are opened up in the Scriptures, relating to the character of God, the principles of his moral administration, and the nature of his dealings with men,—amidst all those subjects, the devout reader of the Bible is never permitted to lose sight of the sufferings of Christ, as constituting the grand theme alike of Moses, of the Psalms, and of the Prophets,—that without which sinful men could find nothing in Scripture to awaken any hope or to minister any consolation. And to true believers this will ever be one of the charms by which the Scriptures are endeared to them. It is to a suffering Saviour that they must look for comfort in the time of affliction, and for a revival of hope in seasons of spiritual depression; for it is in the believing contemplation of his love in having so suffered that the Holy Spirit unfolds to them clearer and larger discoveries of his all-sufficiency. Whenever, therefore, they meet in Scripture with what brings vividly before them Christ in his humiliation, bearing the sins of his people, wounded for their transgressions, and bruised for their iniquities, they must feel that the subject is ever new, because it is ever interesting, being that which gives interest to every thing else that they find there. And in the passage before us Christ is so set forth. Had not the rock in Horeb been smitten, so as to send forth water for the refreshment of Israel, they must have perished in the waste howling wilderness. Yet their destitution did but faintly represent the spiritual misery and helplessness of sinners when Christ was smitten for their relief,—as many can bear witness who have long toiled and laboured in a dry and parched land, seeking relief from an oppressing sense of sin and helplessness, ere they were persuaded to apply to the Fountain of living water. And if this passage reminds such how necessary it was for their relief that Christ should be smitten, it will also suggest to them how intense must have been the suffering which he endured when the hand of God did so smite him. It was, indeed, in itself but a feeble stroke wherewith Moses smote the rock with his rod. But how inconceivable the power which accompanied that stroke, and which "brought streams out of the rock, and caused waters to run down like rivers." And what,

then, must Christ have endured under the stroke of the same power, when put forth to execute on him, as the sinner's Surety, the penalty which the sinner had incurred,—when the Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all,—when the word went forth, "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow: smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered,"—and when, in the hour of darkness and desertion, he "offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears, unto him that was able to save him from death!"

But, in the second place, this passage brings before us, in a very clear and striking light, the rich provision which Christ by his sufferings and death has made for the supply of all our spiritual wants,—the fulness and the freeness of his salvation. The passage itself simply bears that the Lord commanded Moses, saying, "Go on before the people, and take with thee of the elders of Israel; and thy rod, wherewith thou smotest the river, take it in thine hand, and go. Behold, I will stand before thee there upon the rock in Horeb; and thou shalt smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink. And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel." But from the passages which I have already had occasion to quote, and from others, we learn not only that the water flowed in great abundance at the moment, but that it continued to flow down in a stream; for we are told that at a future period, when Israel sinned the great sin of making and worshipping a graven image, Moses took their sin, the calf which they had made, and burnt it with fire, and stamped and ground it very small, even till it was as small as dust, and cast the dust thereof into the brook that descended out of the mount, and made the children of Israel drink of it. It appears, moreover, that this stream or river followed them throughout their future wanderings in the wilderness, furnishing in abundance water for them to drink. The apostle expressly asserts that it followed, or went after them; and in accordance with this is the history of Israel subsequently to the period referred to in the passage we are considering; for in that history, during the next eight-and-thirty years, we read of no instance of the people murmuring or complaining, ready as they ever were to do so, of the want of water. The inference, therefore, plainly is, I think, that during the

whole of that period they were supplied with water in abundance from the smitten rock in Horeb. About the end of that period, when the people of Israel were, for the second time, approaching the confines of Canaan, after having, by their waywardness and distrust, forfeited and lost the promise of an immediate possession of the land, we do find them again in want of water, and, as usual, clamorous for a supply. Whether the water which had till then followed them was stayed in the way of chastisement because of their disobedience, I do not venture to decide. But a new supply was furnished after the same manner as before, though, it would appear, from a different rock, and under a special commission of a somewhat different kind. "Take the rod," said the Lord unto Moses, "and gather thou the assembly together, thou, and Aaron thy brother, and speak ye unto the rock before their eyes; and it shall give forth his water, and thou shalt bring forth to them water out of the rock: so thou shalt give the congregation and their beasts drink." In obedience to this command, Moses went forth to the rock; but instead of speaking to it, he smote it, and smote it twice.

It could hardly be the rock which he first smote in Horeb. Yet it is called the rock, as if to intimate that though not the same, yet one rock having been smitten, this one did not require more than to be spoken to in order to its sending forth anew the water which had been for a time stayed. In connection with this subject, it has been remarked that "Jesus Christ, who was the Rock, was to be smitten only once by the rod of divine justice." May it not have been on this account mainly that the sin of Moses on that occasion was visited with so sore a chastisement as that of his being prevented from entering into the land of Canaan, permission being granted to him only to see it afar off? His disobedience in twice smiting the rock, instead of simply speaking to it, as he had been commanded to do, was sufficient no doubt to account for the sentence which went forth: "Ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them." But might it not also be intended to bear testimony to the perfection of Christ's work, by very expressively intimating that he was to be smitten only once,—that he needed not to be but once offered to bear the sins of many,—that his work would be completed when he had offered one sac-

rifice for sin,—and that by his one offering he was to perfect for ever them that are sanctified? But however this may be, the fulness of Christ's salvation, the unlimited efficacy of his blood as an atonement for sin, and the inexhaustible supplies of grace which he has in store for as many as believe in his name, were beautifully set forth in the abundant supply of water which was provided for Israel in the wilderness from the smitten rock in Horeb.

Water is an emblem more frequently used, perhaps, than any other in Scripture, to set forth the effects of Christ's death, both in the pardon of sin and in the sanctification of the sinner. In regard to the former,—namely, pardon and acceptance with God,—it was foretold, as one of the consequences of Messiah's work, "There shall be a fountain opened to the house of David, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness." And in the New Testament, the virtue of Christ's blood in taking away the guilt of sin, and rendering sinners judicially clean, or righteous, in the sight of God, is represented by the same symbol. "The blood of Jesus Christ," we are assured, "cleanseth us from all sin,"—that is, from the guilt of all sin. And believers are thus taught to celebrate the praises of their Redeemer, "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever." And with regard to sanctification, it were impossible, within the limits of an exposition like this, to refer to all the passages of Scripture in which the operation of the Spirit, in his purifying and consoling influences, is represented to us by the same figure of water. And does not the experience of believers bear witness, that by no figure could the blessed effects of the Spirit's work on the heart be more appropriately set forth? For when, by his teaching, they are brought to see and understand the perfection and all-sufficiency of Christ's one sacrifice, and, by a believing application thereto, have their conscience pacified and their guilty fears dismissed,—and when, by his gracious operation on their hearts, they are comforted and sustained under affliction,—reconciled to all God's dealings with them,—enabled with holy and child-like confidence to draw near to the throne of grace, there to pour out their hearts, and make known their wants by supplication and prayer,—admitted to hold close and intimate fel-

lowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ,—and quickened to run with enlarged hearts in the way of the divine commandments;—to what can they more appropriately compare these blessed effects of the Spirit's influence than to the refreshment of cold water to the thirsty soul? Never did the parched Israelite in the wilderness betake himself more eagerly to the stream which issued from the rock in Horeb, than the believer, in a season of spiritual languor and weariness, applies to that living water which flows from the wounded Saviour; and when the Spirit unfolds to his understanding, and savingly impresses on his heart, the great truths of the Gospel, taking of the things of Christ, and showing them unto his soul, he feels assured that the bodily relief and refreshment which Israel of old experienced, when they drank, freely and to the full, of the waters which were provided for them in the wilderness, did but very faintly represent the consoling and invigorating influence of the Spirit, for which he is indebted to Him from whose wounded side there flowed blood and water. He feels that the Scriptures do, as it were, speak literally, and declare nothing more than what he has realised in his own experience, when they say that Christ is "as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." And if there be thus an abundant supply for the spiritual necessities of sinners provided in Him who is the great antitype of the smitten rock, so that supply is as free as it is ample. Like as Israel of old had liberty of access to the waters of Horeb, so whosoever will may come and take of the water of life freely. If there be any thirsty soul that would fain taste of this water,—would fain know something of what it has never yet known, the peace, the comfort, the everlasting consolation, the lively hope, the refreshment of spirit, which are represented as the common portion of all who believe,—the invitation to all such is, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money: come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price."

This most precious truth is still further illustrated and enforced by another circumstance connected with the miracle here recorded, and which presents to us, in a very vivid light, another view of Christ and his salvation. At the moment that Moses was commanded to take his rod and smite the rock in Horeb,

that water might come out for the people to drink, the children of Israel were in a state of open and daring rebellion against God, —rebellion greatly aggravated by the marvellous mercy which they had a short time before begun to experience, and which they still continued to enjoy in the manna which was every day rained from heaven for their support. Instead of being rendered submissive, or even silenced, by that demonstration of the divine forbearance and bounty, they seemed to presume upon it, and to be emboldened thereby to demand as a right whatever they might feel to be necessary for their comfort. They did chide with Moses, as they had done on a former occasion, saying, "Give us water that we may drink;" and when Moses reminded them that in chiding with him they were tempting the Lord, his remonstrance served only to irritate them the more; for they murmured and said, "Wherefore is this that thou hast brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst?" Nay, so daring, so ferocious, did they become, that "Moses cried unto the Lord, saying, What shall I do unto this people? they be almost ready to stone me." And who on reading this can fail to recollect that the perverse children of this perverse people were often, not only almost, but altogether ready to stone Him who had come to open up to them the fountain of living water,—and that they did not merely despise and reject, but ultimately crucify and slay him? How true is it, then, that Christ died for his enemies! For though all men were not, and could not be personally engaged in crucifying the Lord of glory, yet all are partakers of the same sinful nature, which in the Jews of old was so irritated and called into violent activity as to hurry them on to that atrocious deed. The fact that the Son of God was reviled, persecuted, spit upon, and put to death by individuals of the very race which he had come to redeem, stands an eternal monument of the desperate wickedness of the human heart, the fearful degradation of man's fallen nature; and symptoms of the same depravity and degradation will be found in every human being, inasmuch as it is testified alike by Scripture and experience, that all are by nature alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them,—that all are enemies to God in their heart by wicked works.

But while this consideration is fitted to crush us to the earth, under a sense of our guiltiness and sin, it ought also to overwhelm us with amazement in contemplating the grace and mercy of God, who commendeth his love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us, even for the ungodly. The salvation of Christ, therefore, must be as free as it is full; for if it were not, there never has been, and never can be an individual of the human race who could become partaker of it. And herein is the solution of all the doubts and difficulties which many apparently humble, but I fear self-righteous souls are wont to plead, as a reason why they have not tasted of that water of life which can alone impart spiritual joy, refreshment, and vigour. They are not worthy, they say, to come to Christ. And certainly they are not. But who ever was so? If any man could be singled out as in himself worthy of being made partaker of the blessings of Christ's salvation, then for that man Christ did not die. He came to seek and to save that which was lost,—he came to call, not the righteous, but sinners to repentance; and had it been otherwise, he had never visited this sinful world. Let us see to it then, that if we have not yet experienced joy and peace in believing, we are not cherishing pride and self-righteous feelings, and, under these, inadequate views of the evil and deformity of sin, in other words, the love of sin. The salvation of Christ is intended for and pressed upon the acceptance of sinners, even the chief of sinners. It is as free to all as the water of Horeb was to the congregation of Israel. None, it is true, were compelled to drink of that water against their will, but all were welcome who chose to take of it. And to all who have heard the Gospel, but have failed to embrace it, Christ will at last say, Ye would not come unto me that ye might have life, and that ye might have it more abundantly.

But there is still another point of view in which the passage before us presents to us Christ and his salvation. The rock itself which was smitten, the apostle expressly says, was Christ; and it will be remembered that the name "Rock" is very frequently given in Scripture to God, as denoting strength and security, when he is spoken of as the refuge and the resting-place of his people. And so Christ is also called. To some, indeed, he is represented

as a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence; and in this light, also, he is set forth in the passage under consideration. When Israel languished and were ready to faint in the waste howling wilderness, we can easily conceive that the hard and barren rock was the last place to which they would naturally look for a supply of water. And so it is with sinners in regard to Christ. In their pursuit of happiness, they are continually exposed to disappointment, and, in point of fact, do every day more or less experience it. But in casting about for relief and rest, how eagerly will they have recourse to every other quarter, rather than betake themselves to Christ! and when urged to do so,—when told that with Him alone is that fountain of living water that can satisfy the desires of an immortal soul, and that whosoever drinketh of that water shall never thirst again,—how unpromising, nay, how offensive does all this appear to them! The Gospel is to them barren of every thing that can minister to their enjoyment. Christ himself is a root out of a dry ground; he hath no form nor comeliness; and when they see him, there is no beauty that they should desire him. But how different is it with those who have been persuaded to seek, and enabled to find their satisfying good in His salvation! Having once tasted of the water of life, they return to the refreshing stream as often as they again languish and become weary in their journey through the wilderness; and as often as they do return to it, they find it as copious as ever; for the Fountain whence it flows is inexhaustible. The rock in Horeb, though smitten by the rod of Moses, stood unmoved still in all its strength,—an emblem of Him who is the Rock of Ages, the Sure Foundation which God has laid in Zion —"the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever."

It is this consideration,—the view of Christ's immutability,—that constitutes the strength of the believer's confidence amidst all the disorder that prevails and all the changes that take place in the world. That disorder and these changes are under the absolute control of Christ, and will be overruled for the accomplishment of his mediatorial work. They cannot, therefore, remove the believer from the sure foundation on which he rests, nor can they arrest the communication of spiritual blessings which flow to him from his living Head. United to Christ by faith, he is fixed upon a Rock against which the gates of hell shall never prevail,—he

is in immediate communication with an exhaustless Fountain of living water from which he cannot be separated. And how insignificant, then, is every other object of interest, how valueless every other portion compared with an interest in Christ,—a participation in the blessings of His salvation! And how momentous to every one of us should be the question, whether we are thus resting on the one only sure foundation,—whether we have yet drunk of the water which Christ gives, and which will be in us "a well of water springing up into everlasting life!" Whatever other foundation we may lean on, it will be overthrown,—whatever other fountains we may drink at, they will be dried up. It is in Christ only that we shall find a foretaste and pledge of that fulness of joy which is in the presence of God, and of those pleasures which are at his right hand for evermore.

XXX.

THE DOOM OF AMALEK.

EXODUS XVII. 14-16.

THE occasion of the instructions here given to Moses is related in the preceding verses. The people of Israel, after various journeyings, had pitched in Rephidim, where there was no water for them to drink; and when Moses, driven to extremity by their murmurings, "cried unto the Lord, saying, What shall I do unto this people? they be almost ready to stone me," God was pleased to deliver his servant, and to manifest his forbearance towards the people, by commanding Moses to smite the rock in Horeb, whence there issued water for the people to drink. "Then," adds the historian, "then came Amalek, and fought with Israel in Rephidim." To meet this new trial, the most formidable, perhaps, in some respects of all that they had yet encountered, Moses commanded Joshua to choose him out men, and to go out, and meet with Amalek in the field of battle, while he himself stood on the top of the hill with the rod of God in his hand,—as if appealing to the divine faithfulness whether the rod of his strength, by which so many wonderful works had already been wrought, was still to be full of might for the deliverance of his people, or was to prove weak and powerless against their new adversary. The appeal was heard and answered. The strength of Amalek give way before the rod by which the sea had been driven back, and the flinty rock had been turned into a water-spring; and the more clearly to demonstrate that this

power was of God, "it came to pass, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed; and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed." Israel were thus taught that in their own strength they could not have successfully contended with Amalek, while, at the same time, they had, in the transactions of that memorable day, a very striking proof of the divine faithfulness, as well as of the infinite facility with which God could defeat the stratagems and repel the assaults of their most formidable enemies. The more deeply to impress this truth on the minds of Israel, the conflict was protracted even unto the going down of the sun; the victory, meanwhile, inclining to the side of Israel or of Amalek, according as Moses was or was not able to hold up his hand. But being strengthened by Aaron and Hur staying up his hands, the one on the one side, and the other on the other side, he was enabled to maintain the attitude on which God was pleased to determine that victory should be suspended; and the issue was, that "Joshua discomfited Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword. And the Lord said unto Moses, Write this for a memorial in a book, and rehearse it in the ears of Joshua; for I will utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven."

It will readily occur to the attentive reader, that the issue of the conflict here related was, on various accounts, an event of unspeakable importance to Israel. They could not but know that before it was possible for them to take possession of the land which had been promised to their fathers, they must of necessity encounter the opposition, the determined resistance of the nations which were then in possession of that land,—and if they reflected at all, they must have anticipated a succession of severe and lengthened conflicts. But whether they foresaw them or not, such conflicts did await them; and with their proneness to unbelief, what would have been the effect, if either they had been worsted in their contest with Amalek, or had triumphed in such a way as might have afforded any ground for supposing that their own arm had gotten them the victory? It was the first time they had actually encountered an enemy in battle; and, to all appearance, it was then to be decided whether they were to advance farther on their way towards Canaan, or perish in the wilderness. It is plain, from all that is recorded of their character,

that any thing less than a decisive victory would have overwhelmed them in utter despondency, and called forth a new manifestation of unbelief and rebellion. It was, therefore, a very gracious act on the part of God,—a very affecting proof of the merciful adaptation of his dealings with Israel to their character and condition, that he gave them the victory,—an example of his dispensations now, as well as in all past times, in laying upon his people no burden which he does not strengthen them to bear, and in not suffering them to be tempted above that they are able; but with the temptation also making a way to escape, that they may be able to bear it.

But the manner of the victory was not less important than the victory itself. If Israel were prone to unbelief, they were no less prone to presumption, pride, and self-confidence; and of this disposition a very remarkable instance is furnished by their next meeting with Amalek, which took place in about a year after the period referred to in the passage we are considering, when they were on the very borders of Canaan. On that occasion they gave way to fear and distrust, and refused to go up and take possession of the land, because the inhabitants thereof were strong, and their cities walled and very great, urging, among other reasons, that the children of Anak were there, and that the Amalekites dwelt in the south. For this unbelief and rebellion, they were doomed to wander in the wilderness till forty years were completed from the time at which they left Egypt. On this purpose of God being announced to them, they ran from unbelief and despair to the other extremity of presumption, and insisted on immediately advancing on their enemies, saying, "Lo, we be here, and will go up unto the place which the Lord hath promised;" and though they were warned that God would not go with them,—that their resolution was too late,—and that they would be smitten before their enemies; yet "they presumed to go up unto the hill-top," and "the Amalekites came down, and the Canaanites which dwelt in that hill, and smote them, and discomfited them." Now, it was another gracious manifestation of God's character in his dealings with them, that in their first conflict with Amalek, there was every thing not only to preserve them from fear and distrust, if they should again be called to contend with the same enemy, but to guard them

against presumption and self-confidence; for though they gained the victory, they gained it not by the wisdom of their own counsels or by the strength of their own arm, but by the immediate, the visible interposition of Him who had brought them out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. They failed, it appears, to draw from this dispensation the wholesome, the holy lesson which it was designed to teach them. But their folly and guilt detract nothing from the grace and wisdom of God in furnishing them with that lesson, while their conduct justified, even in our apprehension of things, the severity of the sentence which was passed upon them, when the Lord said, "As ye have spoken in mine ears, so will I do to you: your carcase shall fall in this wilderness." Nor was their victory over Amalek merely a single instance of success, calculated to call forth at the moment their tribute of gratitude and praise. It was their first victory, and therefore a pledge to them of triumph in every subsequent combat in which they might be called to engage; and though those of them who ought to have been the most forward to recognise and rely on this pledge, even those who were old enough to remember God's mighty works in Egypt, were the first to overlook, or forget, or disbelieve the assurance thus given them in the plains of Rephidim, that they would be equally victorious in every future conflict; yet we can easily conceive what encouragement and confidence the recollection of this first battle with Amalek would give to their children, whom God brought into the land of Canaan. When they saw Joshua appointed to succeed Moses as the ruler over God's heritage, and, under his guidance, began to execute God's judgments on the inhabitants of Canaan, they could not fail, amidst all their sharp and severe conflicts, to look back to the time when their leader, yet a youth, conducted them to triumph over the armies of Amalek, and to see in his appointment a renewed pledge of their final victory over all their enemies.

Reflections like these might naturally have been suggested by the simple narrative contained in the preceding verses, though nothing more had been said than merely that Israel fought, and that in God's strength they had discomfited their enemies. And we could well conceive also, that Israel themselves might have been disposed to erect some memorial of this their first

victory, in testimony alike of their gratitude for the past, and of their confidence in the divine faithfulness for the future. But a peculiar interest attaches to this event, in consequence of the care which was taken, by the express command of God himself, for preserving the remembrance of it; and much important instruction may be derived from the manner in which provision was made for its being so remembered. Israel were not left merely to infer, from the success of their first battle, that God would be with them in every future conflict; although they might have drawn that conclusion, and ought to have found in it abundant encouragement and consolation. He was pleased expressly to pledge his faithfulness that it would be so; and that pledge was given in a form fitted alike to awaken their reverential awe, and to command their unreserved confidence: "The Lord said unto Moses, Write this for a memorial in a book, and rehearse it in the ears of Joshua; for I will utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven. And Moses built an altar, and called the name of it Jehovah-Nissi,"—that is, Jehovah my banner, in allusion, perhaps, to the rod which he held up, and under which Israel had fought and conquered: "for he said, Because the Lord hath sworn that the Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation." There is confessedly a difficulty as to the rendering of this last verse. The words literally are, "For he said, Because the hand is on, or against the throne of the Lord, the Lord will have war with Amalek." Our translators, supposing the hand to mean the hand of God, have considered the expression, "The hand on the throne of the Lord," as equivalent to "The Lord hath sworn,"—as if he had laid his hand upon his throne; and so, accordingly, they have rendered it. But they were not without some doubt on the subject. They supposed that "the hand" might mean the hand of Amalek, and in this view the passage would run thus, "Because the hand of Amalek is against the throne of the Lord, the Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation." Accordingly they have so translated the passage in the margin; and to this rendering, I confess, I am strongly inclined. It expresses, in a very definite and emphatic manner, what is everywhere plainly taught in Scripture, and implied in the whole passage, independently of the precise ren-

dering of the last verse, namely, that God regarded the cause of Israel as his own cause, and their enemies as his enemies. He had chosen them, in the exercise of his sovereign grace, that they might be to him for a name, and for a praise, and for a glory in the earth. The manifestation of his supremacy as the living and the true God was suspended on the safe conduct of Israel to the land of Canaan, and their establishment in the possession of that land as their rightful inheritance. Not only had all this been sworn to Abraham, and the promise repeated to his posterity, but God had given intimations of his purpose sufficiently plain and palpable to be intelligible to all the surrounding nations, and sufficiently terrible, moreover, to show how vain and impious it were to attempt a defeat of that purpose. Those, then, who dared to make the attempt were waging war with God's sovereignty,—they were disputing and endeavouring to disprove his supremacy,—they were lifting their hand against the throne of the Lord. In this fearful warfare,—this desperately infatuated rebellion against Jehovah,—Amalek had the guilty pre-eminence of taking the lead; and it was befitting the divine rectitude, therefore, that he should not only be defeated, but be set forth an awful example of the righteous judgment of God, that others might take warning of the inevitable ruin which must sooner or later be the portion of those who are found fighting against him. And such, accordingly, was the divine determination concerning him. God commanded Moses to write it for a memorial in a book, and rehearse it in the ears of Joshua, that the Lord would utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven. Moses accordingly did so, not only in the passage under consideration, but at a subsequent period, when he delivered a solemn charge to Israel, immediately before his death, to remember the divine purpose which had been revealed and the divine promise which had been given to them in Rephidim, and to see to it that they were faithful to do their part towards the accomplishment of that purpose. "Remember what Amalek did unto thee by the way, when ye were come forth out of Egypt; how he met thee by the way, and smote the hindmost of thee, even all that were feeble behind thee, when thou wast faint and weary; and he feared not God. Therefore it shall be, when the Lord thy God hath given thee rest from

all thine enemies round about, in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee for an inheritance to possess it, that thou shalt blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven; thou shalt not forget it."

I have already had occasion to remark that the manner in which God pledged to Israel, in the instance before us, his presence and protection in all future trials, was fitted alike to awaken their reverential awe and command their unreserved confidence. And the truth of this remark is, I think, abundantly obvious. In the doom pronounced upon Amalek, they received a more affecting, a more deeply impressive assurance of God's favour for them, than had been conveyed by any other interposition which they had experienced in the wilderness. The daily supply of manna from heaven, and of water from the rock in Horeb, was, no doubt, a very marvellous expression of his beneficence, and a very unequivocal declaration that he had taken them under his special keeping, inasmuch as he had brought them into the wilderness, where they had nothing to look to for their support but what he was pleased to furnish by immediate interposition, and where, therefore, they might rest assured that he would never forget nor forsake them. But in the judgment which he pronounced upon Amalek, he identified their triumph with the vindication of his own sovereignty, with the glory of his own name, with the manifestation of his supremacy in the sight of the nations. He declared that they who fought with them waged war against him,—that the very honour of his glorious majesty was bound up with the fulfilment of all the good things which he had promised to them and to their fathers,—that he who touched them touched the apple of his eye. It was impossible to give them a more deeply affecting proof of his grace, and love, and favour, than by thus declaring, that because Amalek had been the first to lay wait for and to assault them, therefore he would have war with Amalek from generation to generation.

And what unreserved and unshaken confidence ought not this to have awakened in their minds! And, at the same time, what a holy fear of offending God, of acting a part inconsistent with the place which they occupied in his favour and regard, ought it not to have generated! With what dread, might we not sup-

pose, they would have shrunk from the thought of entertaining for a moment any distrust of the power and faithfulness of Him who had suspended the manifestation of his sovereignty and perfections on their safety and well-being! And how should these sentiments have been strengthened and confirmed by the part which was assigned to them in the execution of the divine judgments against Amalek! Not only was the sentence which was pronounced on that nation a solemn warning to Israel, in common with all others, of the guilt and danger of setting themselves against the purposes of God, but it was to them invested with a peculiar solemnity. They were appointed to be the executioners of that sentence,—an appointment which, we might suppose, would render it impossible for them ever to forget their first conflict with Amalek, and would never cease to keep alive in their minds feelings of holy awe for the purity and rectitude of Him whose sovereignty and faithfulness they were commissioned to vindicate. If it failed to awaken and keep alive such sentiments, what other conceivable motive could have done so? Remembering that appointment, they could have no fear or distrust as to the issue of their conflict with Amalek, if engaged in at a time and in circumstances accordant with the divine will; and while so engaged, they could hardly fail to have upon their spirits a solemn sense of the guilt and ruinous consequences of rebelling against God. Yet neither they nor their children after them kept the commandment of the Lord in regard to this matter. They themselves, as we have already seen, were discomfited by this very enemy a short time afterward, because they presumptuously insisted on going up against them, not to fulfil the divine judgment, but in direct opposition to the expressly declared will of God. We learn from the Book of Judges, that among the nations which were not cast out, but which the Lord left to prove Israel, Amalek was one; and that more than once they smote and oppressed Israel because of their transgressions. At a later period, the commission against Amalek, and expressly for the reason stated in the passage we are considering, was renewed to Saul in the most unqualified terms, requiring him to go up and smite and utterly destroy them; and because he failed to obey this commandment in the terms of his commission, he and his family forfeited the crown

of Israel. Nor was it till the time of David that the divine judgment was executed to its full extent. But it was executed; and though, by reason of the faithlessness of Israel, to whom its execution had been entrusted, the conflict was long protracted, and, as in the first, the victory inclined apparently sometimes to the one side, and sometimes to the other, yet the Lord had "war with Amalek from generation to generation."

The instruction thus furnished by the passage under consideration, though in some respects peculiarly valuable to Israel, was not confined to them. It is profitable to the Church in all ages, inasmuch as in all ages the condition of the Church, though varying in some external circumstances, has been essentially the same. In the purpose and sight of God, his people,—true believers,—those who constitute the Church,—are as really separated from the rest of the world now, as Israel were from the surrounding nations of old. It is, too, on the fulfilment of his promises to the Church,—the accomplishment of the glorious things which are spoken of the city of God,—that he has suspended the brightest manifestation of his character and perfections. He has promised, he has sworn in covenant, to give his Son the heathen for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession; and on the final subjection of the kingdoms of this world to the dominion of Christ, there has been, and there is now depending, the vindication of the power, the faithfulness, the supremacy of God. His oath to Abraham did, no doubt, involve in it the subjection of Canaan to Abraham's posterity; and that oath could no more be forgotten or violated than the unchangeable God could change. But in our weak apprehension of things, and according to our conceptions, there is something more solemn still, more removed as it were, if that were possible, beyond the possibility of failure, in the oath sworn to Christ, that his kingdom shall extend from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth. The incarnation, sufferings, and death of his only begotten and well-beloved Son,—the innumerable types, figures, prophecies, and promises of many successive generations,—the hopes and prayers of countless multitudes of saints and martyrs in every age of the Church,—the expectations and earnest longings even of angels themselves,—all are calling for the fulfilment of the promise that the

kingdoms of the earth shall become the one kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ. And until that shall take place, the promise in the passage before us will not have been fulfilled. That promise was to be rehearsed in the ears of Joshua,—or Jesus, as the word means,—implying that he was charged with the execution of God's revealed purpose. But Joshua was himself only a type of Him whose name he bore; and this passage, therefore, was only one among the many forms in which the Covenant of Grace was revealed to the Church,—that Covenant whereby there was secured to Christ the salvation of his Church,—the separation of his people from a world lying in sin,—their triumph over all opposition,—and their final establishment in the heavenly Canaan, the rest that remaineth for the people of God.

The vindication, then, of the character of God as the only living and true God,—as the Sovereign Ruler of the universe,—as the faithful and the covenant-keeping God, is as really, and, in our apprehension, as palpably suspended, if not more so, on the final triumph of the Gospel, as ever it was on the establishment of Israel in Canaan. And in like manner the people of God,—the Church,—true believers,—are, as in the case of Israel, entrusted, as instruments, with the execution of the divine purpose; and in fulfilling their commission they too will have opposition to overcome, and enemies to contend with. As there never has ceased, since the date of the passage before us, to be a true Church in the world,—an Israel; so there has never been wanting an Amalek to contend with and endeavour to cut it off. The weapons of the Church's warfare are, indeed, no longer carnal. Not only has she no commission to wield such weapons, but she is expressly forbidden to do so. But her warfare is not on that account the less real,—nor are her enemies less formidable,—nor faith and firmness on her part less needful. I say nothing of the direct persecution to which she has often been, and, in all probability, may again be exposed; for the spirit and temper of the times may be the means, under God, of exempting her from the more revolting forms of persecution. But there have been in all ages, and I fear there are still, many who directly oppose the progress of the Gospel,—and many more who, by their character and influence, discourage and discountenance

whatever has a direct tendency to bring men under its holy power,—pleading, it may be, their dread of fanaticism and folly, for so doing. These form the Amalek with whom the Lord will have war from generation to generation; and the conduct, the maintenance of this war he has outwardly committed to Israel, his Church, requiring of them that, by the holy influence of their life, and by their zeal, and unwearied exertion, they shall labour to counteract the deadly power of these adversaries. And with this commission he has given them also all the encouragement which he gave to Israel of old, and presented to them, in an unspeakably stronger light, all the motives which can operate in animating them with energy and perseverance. The Lord's promise, that he would utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven, was rehearsed in the ears of Joshua, and, therefore, involved a promise that Joshua should lead Israel to victory. But to Jesus he has sworn that "his throne shall be established for ever,"—that "they that dwell in the wilderness shall bow before him,"—that "his enemies shall lick the dust,"—yea, that "all kings shall fall down before him,"—"all nations shall serve him."

And how has the Church hitherto acquitted herself in this holy warfare? Let the countless multitudes who are still sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death, on whom it has never been attempted to make the light of the Gospel to shine,—let the thousands, and tens of thousands who are living as heathens, even in the lands where the Gospel is known,—reply to this question. The glad tidings of salvation have reached many, and I doubt not have brought light, and life, and comfort to not a few; and God in his providence has opened up channels of communication whereby they may convey these glad tidings to others. Yet the Church, greatly, I fear, through her own fault, has hitherto been, in comparison with the world, a small flock,—like the congregation of Israel in the wilderness of Horeb. The people of God have, no doubt, in all ages, to a certain extent, borne testimony for him, and, to that extent, have executed their commission against Amalek; for if their life and character have been in any degree consistent with their profession, they could not fail to exercise some salutary influence on the world around them. But in consequence, I fear, of their faithlessness and

want of fortitude, the conflict has too often been doubtful,—the victory has too frequently inclined to the side of their enemies; and though the final result cannot be doubtful, this consideration should only humble them the more when they reflect how little they have contributed to the triumph of the cause which involves the vindication of the divine faithfulness, and the manifestation of the Redeemer's glory.

These are general reflections,—general, I mean, in this sense, that they apply to the Church and the people of God in their collective capacity; and though every one who rightly understands what is implied in a Christian profession and in Christian obligations will admit the truth of what has now been stated, as to the want of zeal, diligence, and perseverance on the part of the Church at large, in labouring to carry into effect the promise in the passage under consideration, even to "put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven;" yet I am aware that individuals may very easily find out a way of escape from such a charge, just as an individual of a large body of men on whom any responsibility rests, contrives, without much difficulty, to rid himself of his share of the responsibility, or at least to persuade himself that his share is very light. But the reflections, vague as they may seem, do nevertheless very naturally suggest a question, from which no man who admits the divine authority of the Bible will find it easy to make his escape. The question is, Am I of Israel, or of Amalek? It is not enough that I am able to say, in reply to this question, I am not conscious of having ever directly endeavoured to defeat God's purposes regarding his Church; I have not knowingly laboured to turn away any weak believer from the faith; I have not endeavoured to seduce the young and inexperienced, or to make them ashamed of their profession, as Amalek laid wait to smite the feeble and the weary of Israel; I have never openly poured ridicule and reproach on those who have manifested zeal for the advancement of God's glory in the world; and I would not, even if I had the power, use any efforts to cool the ardour or weaken the exertions of those who devote themselves to the propagation of the Gospel throughout the world. I have never, therefore, lifted my hand against the throne of Jehovah. I may have done none of these things, and yet I may be of Amalek. The charge laid upon

Israel of old still lies with undiminished, nay, with increased weight of responsibility upon the Church now, and, therefore, upon every individual believer. I am charged not to forget that the Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation; and a portion of the responsibility of this charge rests upon me, even to the full extent of my talents, influence, and opportunities. I am required to be diligent and undismayed in the holy, the peace-making warfare of persuading sinners to throw down the weapons of their rebellion, and to become the willing and obedient subjects of Christ's spiritual kingdom. I am charged to exhibit, in my own character and conduct, an example of what I should wish others to be,—and to beware of giving occasion to any one to doubt, whether I am ready to discountenance and discourage every thing that stands opposed to the power and practice of vital godliness. And if, therefore, I am not careful so to live and act, have I not reason to fear that I am still of Amalek, and not of Israel? "He that is not for me is against me," was the solemn declaration of our Lord; and how many, how very many are there who, under this rule, this infallible rule of judging, will be found to be against him,—ranked among and dealt with as those with whom he has war from generation to generation! And if I am among that number, how miserable is my condition! Through the forbearance and long-suffering patience of God, I may for a season, perhaps a comparatively long season, enjoy a respite from the sentence that has gone forth against me; for Amalek is not cut off in a day. But the sentence must be executed, and I am lost for ever. On the other hand, if I belong to Israel, then however unsuccessful I may to all appearance be in the holy warfare in which I am engaged, or however severely I may suffer in the conflict, my ultimate victory is sure; and the faith of this will render every trial comparatively light and every sacrifice easy. If, then, we would have peace in our own souls, or if we would know the blessedness of being instrumental in advancing the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, or the gradual overthrow of the kingdom of darkness, let it be our great concern to make our calling and election sure; and, having settled this momentous question,—having solid and scriptural grounds for believing that we have a portion in Christ, and in his salvation,—then we shall

feel that our best interests are bound up and identified with the interests of Christ's kingdom,—that be the disorder and confusion of the world what they may, all will be made subservient to the establishment of Christ's kingdom, while our well-being is beyond the reach of being injured or endangered,—that the sharper the conflict, the more triumphant will be the victory,—that the more we suffer with Christ here, the better prepared shall we be to reign with him hereafter,—and that "when Christ who is our life shall appear," then shall "we also appear with him in glory."

XXXI.

MOSES IN THE MOUNT.

EXODUS XIX. 3-6.

THE divine communication recorded in these verses was made to Israel at a very memorable period of their history. The time had come when God was to constitute that people his visible Church, to be witnesses for him against the universal idolatry of the rest of the world, and for this purpose to enter into solemn covenant with them, whereby he engaged to be their God, and they became bound to be his people. This he did when, from Sinai, he spake, in the hearing of them all, the words of the ten commandments,—a transaction the most solemn and sublime of all that have been recorded in the history of God's dealings with men. These commandments, which we find recorded in the next chapter, require nothing but what men are bound by the very law of their being to do, or to abstain from doing, in their relation to God on the one hand, and to their fellow-men on the other; and God, therefore, as the great Lawgiver, might at any time, and in any circumstances, have enjoined these commandments upon Israel or upon any other people, requiring obedience to them on pain of incurring his righteous displeasure, even the penalty of death, or, as the Scriptures have more fully explained it, the punishment of "everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power." And so the sum of these commandments, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart," and "Thou shalt love thy neighbour

as thyself," was originally prescribed to man, and on his obedience thereto was suspended the fearful alternative of eternal life or eternal death. He disobeyed, and incurred death; and, therefore, to men, already guilty and condemned, a new revelation of this law, requiring obedience on pain of suffering the penalty of disobedience, could only be a sentence of condemnation. There would have been no need of any trial whether they would obey and live,—in fact, there could have been no room for any such trial. They were condemned already, and, therefore, the promulgation of the law would only have been a publication of their sentence.

It was not, however, for the purpose of putting Israel upon their trial, whether, by a perfect obedience to the law promulgated from Mount Sinai, they would secure the divine favour, that that law was delivered to them. They had already found grace and favour with God, on a ground altogether different from any obedience or righteousness of their own; and care was taken, in the very publication of the law, to prevent Israel from supposing that their compliance with the divine requirements was the procuring cause of the blessings and privileges by which they were distinguished above all the nations of the earth. And such was the design of the communication recorded in the passage under consideration. They were therein reminded of the mighty works which God had wrought for their deliverance, and in such a way as very impressively to show them that they were indebted for that deliverance to the sovereign grace of God, independent altogether of any thing in them on account of which they could have expected, or reckoned on such an interposition. And then this deliverance was urged upon them as a motive for obeying the voice, and keeping the covenant of the Lord, so that God might be glorified in their obedience, and might, in a manner befitting his character, continue still further to bless them, and to do them good.

It was not, indeed, said to them, nor was it intended to be said to them, that their deliverance from Egypt was the only ground of their obligation so to obey the voice of God; for there lies upon every intelligent creature an eternal obligation to obey the commands of the Creator. But the grace of God, as manifested in his interposition on their behalf, was plainly inculcated

as the great, the only motive which in point of fact would ever influence them, in the way of inclining them to a cheerful and childlike obedience; and, as a farther encouragement to this obedience, there was held out to them the promise of still richer and better blessings,—not certainly as rewards which they had merited, or could merit,—but as befitting marks of God's holy approbation of that course of living and acting on their part, whereby his great name would be glorified in the sight of the heathen. "Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself. Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: and ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation."

In the first place, then, Israel were reminded of what God had already done for them; and the language employed was fitted to place before them in a very affecting light the marvellous deliverance which they had experienced. That deliverance had been wrought out in so short a period of time that the simple expression, "Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians," could not fail to call up a lively recollection of the terrible judgments which followed one another in rapid succession, and which terminated in the overthrow of Pharaoh and his host in the Red Sea. And how expressive and full of meaning to them must have been the figurative language employed to set forth the manner of their deliverance,—"Ye have seen how I bare you on eagles' wings!" A few months before, they were scattered abroad throughout all the land of Egypt, to gather stubble instead of straw, wherewith to make their wonted tale of bricks,—the helpless, dispirited, broken-hearted slaves of tyrannical taskmasters; and when we contemplate them gathered into one mighty host, going up through the midst of their oppressors, leaving terror and dismay behind them, passing in safety through the Red Sea, advancing in the face of manifold perils and privations into the wilderness, and encamping by the mount of God, beyond the reach of any created power to injure or disturb them,—how emphatically true must it appear that they had been borne on eagles' wings! It was on a review of these, and of other mighty acts of the Lord, that Moses, at a

later period, taught Israel thus to celebrate the praises of God: "The Lord's portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance. He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; he led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye. As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings: so the Lord alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with him."

We could hardly conceive it possible that Israel could look back from the wilderness of Sinai on the way by which they had been led, and on all that had befallen them in the space of a few months, without being constrained to acknowledge, not only that their deliverance was altogether of God, but that it was as unmerited as it was marvellous, and that He who had done such great things for them was supremely entitled to their unreserved confidence, gratitude, and submission. And it appears that for the moment they did surrender themselves to some such feelings; for, in reply to the divine communication which Moses brought to them, they all answered together, and said, "All that the Lord hath spoken we will do." And this, in fact, was the great end of all God's dealings with them, as it is expressly stated in the passage under consideration, namely, that he might bring them to himself.

It was not enough that he had come down to deliver them from their hard bondage, having heard their groanings, and remembering his covenant with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob. That deliverance was but the first step towards putting them in possession, not only of a rich temporal inheritance into which they were in due time to be brought, but an inheritance infinitely more valuable, even the enjoyment of God himself, whose favour is life, and whose loving-kindness is better than life. And, in gracious condescension to their weakness, in merciful consideration of their blindness and insensibility to spiritual things, he employed means for conveying to them some idea of the reality and the value of the privilege conferred upon them in being admitted into fellowship with himself, whereby that fellowship was rendered palpable to their senses. He brought them into the wilderness far from the habitations of men,—in the absence of all means of subsistence, he fed them there with

bread from heaven, and water from the rock,—he placed around them, by his own immediate presence, a wall of defence which no enemy could break through; and, having thus withdrawn them from the ordinary cares and, concerns of the world, he condescended to hold converse with them, revealing himself to them as the God of their fathers,—the faithful and covenant-keeping God,—and making such discoveries of his character as were fitted alike to command their reverence and awaken their confidence.

Such, indeed, was the hardness of their heart, and such their incapacity for the enjoyment of this high and holy privilege, that they required to be brought under the restraints of the law, which was added because of transgressions, and by which they were shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. But still, they were taught, in a way the plainest and most intelligible, that God's gracious design towards them was that they might enjoy his favour and fellowship,—that what he had done for them was of his sovereign grace and mercy, in terms of the covenant made with Abraham,—and that, in order to render all this more deeply impressive, he had brought them into circumstances where they could not escape from a sense of God's presence, while every thing in his dealings with them had been calculated to win their heart and affections to him as their fathers' God, their almighty deliverer, a very present help in time of trouble. "Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself."

And such is the language in which God still addresses the Church, his redeemed people. They are the subjects of a deliverance, the trophies of a victory unspeakably more glorious than any thing that accompanied the redemption of Israel from bondage. They were the helpless captives of a power which was not to be subdued or broken by the mere act of a power still greater,—as when Moses stretched out his rod over the sea, and the sea returned to his strength, and overwhelmed Pharoah and his host in the mighty deep. When they read, as applicable to themselves, the words of the passage before us, "Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians," they are reminded of One of whom Moses was but a faint type,—even of Him on whom God laid their help, and whom he sent to seek and to save

them ; and they are reminded also of the fearful conflict which he endured in the execution of his commission, when it was required for their deliverance that he should conflict with the powers of darkness, and endure the curse of a broken law in their room. The great object of the Scriptures is to set before the people of God, and to preserve in their habitual recollection, what is briefly expressed in the passage under consideration, the great things which have been done for their redemption from bondage,—even the mediatorial work of the Lord Jesus Christ, in the fulfilment of which he spoiled principalities and powers, and triumphed over them, but did so only by submitting to death, even the death of the cross.

Interesting, then, as were the events which were brought to the recollection of Israel when the Lord said to them, "Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians,"—unspeakably more interesting still are the recollections which must be called up in the minds of the people of God now, when they read these words as addressed to themselves ; inasmuch as there is thereby brought before them all that Christ did and endured for their deliverance, not merely in uttering a command which was omnipotent, or in stretching out the rod of his power, which nothing could resist, but in contending to the death, in maintaining a conflict in which he suffered all that sinless humanity could suffer, and in being victorious, not as Moses was by holding up his hand, but by laying down his life. It was the manifestation of moral excellence, triumphing over moral depravity, that constituted the glory of Christ's victory ; and it is this which gives to the passage before us a depth of meaning which Israel never saw in it, when it was said to them, "Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians ;" and so in the second clause of the same verse, "And how I bare you on eagles' wings." God did, by the hand of Moses, gather into one the miserable oppressed Israelites, who were scattered abroad throughout all the land of Egypt, and carry them, even the feeblest and most helpless, without loss or injury, out of the house of their bondage. But by Jesus Christ, he has gathered out of every country, and kindred, and tongue, and people, a multitude which no man can number, even all whom he has given to the Son in covenant to redeem, and he has borne them on eagles' wings.

We may safely assert that there never has been an individual case of conversion to God, among those who have reached the age at which they were capable of being influenced by motives, where the power of God put forth for effecting such conversion has not been opposed and resisted by the enemy of all righteousness, with the view of retaining the sinner under the bondage of sin, and therefore under condemnation. I am convinced that were we to ask any one who recollects the time, and means, and circumstances of his conversion from darkness to light,—his transition from a state of thoughtlessness and folly, to a state of solemn and serious inquiry after the way of salvation,—he will tell us, that besides the conflict within,—the fears and guilty misgivings of his own heart,—the lurking love of sin,—the various efforts which he made to stifle conviction, and to find rest somewhere short of an unreserved acceptance of Christ,—that besides all these, he had to encounter manifold discouragements and much opposition from without. That opposition might arise within his own family circle, where, because of his earnest and most anxious inquiry on the most momentous of all subjects, his familiar friend took offence, and lifted up the heel against him. If he escaped this, the most painful in some respects of all the forms which persecution assumes, he might encounter similar opposition from that portion of the world, that circle of society, with which he was necessarily connected, and in which he was called to maintain his principles at the expense of forfeiting the friendship of those who could most essentially aid him in his worldly interests and pursuits. Or, peradventure, it may be found that he was called out from the depths of idolatrous darkness into the glorious light of the blessed Gospel, a solitary example of God's sovereign grace amidst a community where ignorance and superstition held almost undisputed sway, and where he might be required to follow Christ at the expense of breaking asunder the tenderest ties which unite members of the same household, and of being treated as an alien, or rather as an outcast, by those whose affection was at one time essential to his enjoyment of every other comfort, and the loss of whose favour was a bar to his finding refuge and relief anywhere else.

It is impossible to reckon up the various ways in which the enemy of souls contrives to hold his captives in bondage, and the

various artifices which he employs to prevent them from availing themselves of the liberty wherewith Christ would make them free. But it may be safely asserted, I believe, that in every case some one or other of these artifices has been and will be employed. It may, however, with still greater confidence be asserted, that in no case has such artifice been successful against any one of God's people. The All-seeing Eye which saw the condition of every one, even the feeblest and most forlorn, of the oppressed and scattered Israelites in the land of Egypt, and never lost sight of one of them, till, at the appointed time, they were gathered together, and carried in triumph out of the house of their bondage,—the same All-seeing Eye is ever upon each individual of those who are ordained unto eternal life. They may be scattered abroad, not merely as wanderers in the same country, but as strangers and sojourners in all lands. Yet they are as much under the inspection and guidance of Him who has chosen and called them, as if each individually were the only object of his care; and it were easy for Him, if so he saw meet, to form them into one community, and separate them visibly from the rest of the world, as he separated Israel of old, and to hedge them in by an impassable barrier, so that nothing could enter to molest or to disturb them. But far more gloriously does he display his infinite knowledge, his almighty power, and his unchangeable faithfulness, in watching over every individual separately in their scattered state, accommodating the supplies of his grace to their peculiar necessities, sustaining them under their trials, lifting them above the assaults of their enemies, and making them more than conquerors through Christ who loved them.

He is thus doing for every individual of his people what he did of old for Israel collectively; and to every one, therefore, he says, "Ye have seen how I bare you on eagles' wings;" and for the same purpose too,—even to bring them to himself. This was the great object of all that Christ did and endured, in so far as his people are concerned. He suffered for sins, "the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God." And so are all his people, even in this life. They are reconciled and brought near to him, so that their fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ; and though they may be widely separated from one another, and in outward circumstances differ

greatly from Israel when encamped at the mount of God as one holy community, visibly distinguished from the world around them, yet they are in reality as distinctly separated from the world as Israel ever were; and while they each hold fellowship with God, they hold also communion with one another, and hear themselves addressed in the words of the passage before us, as words applicable to them in common with all other believers, "Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself."

It will readily be admitted by all who acknowledge the general doctrine of Scripture, that such is the unceasing watchfulness which God exercises over his Church, and that such is the victory which they will assuredly gain, be their enemies ever so numerous or formidable. But it is not enough that we assent to this truth in reference to the Church at large. The important question is, Have we personally any part or lot in this matter? for if we have, then all the glorious things that are spoken of the Church are spoken of us, inasmuch as the humblest believer's portion in the blessings of Christ's salvation is as infallibly secured to him as are the privileges of the Church universal, the body of Christ. But if we have no individual interest in these things,—if we are satisfying ourselves with a mere assent to the truth generally, that such are the privileges of the people of God, but from pretended humility, or from an unwillingness to be brought under such a deep sense of obligation as we are conscious would be laid upon us, did we seriously believe that God has really done for us the great things here set forth, refuse to avail ourselves of them,—if on these, or any similar ground, we are disposed to say that we cannot venture to lay claim to a share in such honours and privileges, taking credit to ourselves, secretly perhaps, for being very humble in so estimating our spiritual character and attainments; then we are still under the dominion of pride and unbelief, and we are yet beyond the reach of the only motive which will ever incline us to cheerful and uniform obedience.

That motive is set forth in the passage under consideration, when, in the second place, God sets before Israel the still greater things that he would do for them, if, under a deep and grateful sense of the deliverance which he had already wrought for them, they would unreservedly surrender themselves to his disposal, to

be governed by his laws and guided by his counsel. "Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: and ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation." All this was addressed to Israel on the assumption that they felt the obligation under which they had been brought by their deliverance from Egypt, and that they ascribed that deliverance to the sovereign grace and mercy of God; for it was adduced as an inference from what had been stated immediately before, "Ye have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself. Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people." The argument, therefore, or the motive which was thus addressed to Israel, can be urged now only on those who feel that they have experienced the spiritual deliverance of which the redemption of Israel from Egypt was but the type. But to all such the argument is one of overwhelming power. It is to this effect: "Ye have seen what I have done for you," in giving up my only-begotten and well-beloved Son for your sakes,—a gift of which you could not have conceived, and which you dared not to have expected; and having thus brought you unto myself, I now pledge my faithfulness and truth that "if you will obey my voice, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me."

The promise is a very remarkable one. It does not say that Israel should be rewarded with this or the other blessing,—that they should be victorious over all their enemies,—and, in spite of all opposition, should be put in possession of the inheritance sworn unto their fathers. All this was no doubt involved in the promise; but it was not the prominent subject of it. The promise was, "Ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people." A peculiar treasure! What language, addressed by the Most High God of heaven and of earth to poor miserable worms of the dust, whom, in his infinite grace and mercy, he had interposed to save by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm! What was there in Israel,—a miserable, degraded, and stiff-necked people,—that could make them a treasure to Him whom the heavens, even the heaven of heavens, cannot contain? Nothing,

certainly; for the manifestations of his grace and mercy served but to exhibit in darker colours their ingratitude and guilt. But he had wrought on their behalf for his own name's sake; and they were dear to him, not only because of his divine beneficence and love, which prompted him to interpose on their behalf, but because also of that very interposition itself, whereby he was to glorify his great name in the sight of the heathen.

And so with his people still. They are dear to him, not only as the objects of his electing love, whereby he chose them before the foundation of the world, but also as being purchased by a price of inestimable value. In this point of view, the people of God are indeed a peculiar treasure, for never was a treasure purchased at such an expense or preserved with so much care. They were bought with the blood of Christ, and their preservation unto eternal life is the grand object to which all the divine dispensations are rendered subservient. The grand motive, therefore, whereby he seeks to win them to holy obedience is not, Do this and live, obey and ye shall be forgiven,—but, I have forgiven you for the sake of Him who suffered, the just for the unjust, that he might bring you unto me. I have brought you unto myself, therefore walk as my redeemed people, and ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me,—a people with whom I will delight to dwell.

The force of this argument, as calculated to awaken and keep alive feelings of gratitude, would be readily and universally admitted, if employed to enforce a sense of obligation towards an earthly benefactor. Suppose, for example, that a generous individual should, by great exertions and some sacrifices, rescue any number of his fellow-men,—say a famishing family,—from want and misery; and, after placing them in circumstances of comfort, and in a way of procuring an honest and honourable subsistence, should say to them, Only act a part becoming the favour I have done you, and the situation in which I have placed you, and you will repay my kindness in a way more gratifying to me than any other recompense whatever could do,—your prosperity and your good conduct will be to me a richer treasure than any thing that wealth could bestow;—suppose such a case, and I believe there is scarcely a man living who would not acknowledge that such a manifestation of kindness on the part of a

benefactor would lay upon the objects of his beneficence an overwhelming weight of obligation to act as he required them to do.

But very different, I fear, is the effect of the argument in reference to God. Unconverted men cannot bear the thought of being addressed by God in the words of the passage before us, "Ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me." It is a very holy thought. The idea cannot be entertained without laying upon the conscience such a constraining power,—such a feeling of obligation,—as is utterly revolting to the natural man. They can bear to be commanded, and even to be threatened, that, in the event of disobedience, they must be punished; because they will find little difficulty in taking shelter in what they call the mercy of God from the terrors of all such commands and threatenings. But to be brought into such a relation to God as is implied in their being a peculiar treasure to him,—a kingdom of priests, offering up to him spiritual sacrifices,—an holy nation, bearing witness for him, by the purity of their life and character, against all that is sinful and ungodly in the world around them,—to be brought into such a relation to God as this is what they cannot endure to think of. It brings them into an atmosphere too pure and holy for them to breathe in.

It will be found, perhaps, that even the people of God themselves are but too backward to accept the things which are freely given them of God. The idea of presumption will at times deter them from enjoying as they might, and as it is intended they should enjoy, the high and holy privileges which are secured to all, however humble, who really believe in the Lord Jesus Christ,—forgetting, or rather not considering, that the fear of being presumptuous in accepting and rejoicing in what God freely gives is not humility but pride,—the pride of lamenting that they are not worthy of such great and glorious blessings. True, they are not worthy, and never will be. But He is infinitely worthy for whose sake these blessings are bestowed; and the more clearly that they perceive the extent of his divine generosity, the more cheerful and uniform will be their obedience. If they are in doubt whether they have fled to Christ and have really believed in him, let them get quit of this doubt without delay, by now betaking themselves to the hope

set before them in the Gospel. But if they are conscious that they have believed through grace, then let them think of the great and glorious privileges which have been secured for them; for the more highly that they think of these, the more powerfully will they be constrained to live, not to themselves, but to him who loved them, and washed them from their sins in his own blood, and has made them kings and priests unto God. To them this passage is addressed, "Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: and ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation."

XXXII.

THE LAW FROM SINAI.

EXODUS XX. 18-21.

It is related in the preceding chapter that when Israel were come into the wilderness of Sinai, in the third month after their departure from the land of Egypt, the Lord commanded Moses to say to them, "Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself. Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: and ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation." Moses, accordingly, "called for the elders of the people, and laid before their faces all these words which the Lord commanded him. And all the people answered together, and said, All that the Lord hath spoken we will do." Immediately thereon, instructions were given to Moses to prepare the people against the third day, when the Lord was to come down in the sight of all Israel upon Mount Sinai, there solemnly to ratify with them the covenant to which they had already pledged themselves to adhere. And this preparation was of the most solemn kind. Moses was commanded to set bounds unto the people round about, that none might go up into the mount, or even touch the border of it,—and that if any one should so much as touch it, he should surely be stoned or shot through; whether it were beast or man, it should not live. And in full accordance with this solemn pre-

paration was the marvellous sight which Israel had been taught to expect; for "it came to pass on the third day in the morning, that there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud; so that all the people that was in the camp trembled. And Moses brought forth the people out of the camp to meet with God; and they stood at the nether part of the mount. And Mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire: and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly. And when the voice of the trumpet sounded long, and waxed louder and louder, Moses spake, and God answered him by a voice." It is not here told to us what Moses said when he spake. But it has been supposed, and, I think, with great probability, that he gave utterance to a feeling of fear and awe, and that when God answered him by a voice, it was an answer of peace and encouragement, assuring him not only of personal safety, but of special favour and regard, to strengthen him for the extraordinary converse which he was about to hold with God for forty days and forty nights in the mount. Indeed, we can hardly conceive it possible that Moses should not have been overwhelmed with something approaching to terror, amidst such convulsions of nature as were befitting intimations of the immediate presence of God, the Lord of glory. All the people in the camp did tremble,—the whole mount quaked greatly,—even Sinai itself was moved at the presence of God, the God of Israel. Moses himself, therefore, just because he knew more, and entertained worthier conceptions of the majesty and glory of God, than any one else in the host of Israel, must have felt a very deep and holy awe while he contemplated, in the thunders, and lightnings, and earthquake, the approaching footsteps of the Lord God Almighty. And if at that moment he spake, it must have been to give expression to these feelings,—it must, I think, have been then that he said what the apostle tells us he did, when, after describing the solemn events which preceded and accompanied the descent of God upon Mount Sinai, he adds, "And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake."

But terrible as this sight must have been in any circumstances, but especially in a waste howling wilderness, there was on that

memorable occasion a display of moral glory and grandeur still more awfully overwhelming than even the thunderings, and lightnings, and earthquake, which were employed to give intimation of God's approach, and which, therefore, must have been terrific beyond what had ever been witnessed or could be conceived of. God then appeared as the righteous Lawgiver,—not merely manifested to the senses of men in fire, and amidst thick darkness,—but addressing himself to their conscience, promulgating in an audible voice that law which requires perfect obedience on pain of death. He there spake the words of the ten commandments, and he added no more,—all other communications to the people of Israel being made, not by the audible voice of God himself, but through Moses as mediator. These ten commandments have been summed up in two, not only by Moses, but by Him who is the Faithful and the True Witness, the Eternal Word, who came to reveal the counsels and the character of God,—"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, ... and thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." These commandments make no provision for any transgression or shortcoming. They are absolute, and from the very nature of law they must be so; for it were a contradiction to say that law can make allowance or grant permission for the violation of itself. When God, therefore, came down on Mount Sinai, and there delivered the ten commandments, he was revealed only as the great Lawgiver, promulgating a law which, from the very perfection of the nature of Him who gave it, must be reasonable, and right, and good, and which, therefore, can neither relax its requirements nor remit aught of its penalty. Whatever God had already revealed, or might afterwards reveal, of his grace and mercy, there was and there could be no such revelation at the giving of the law. That law contained only such requirements and prohibitions as were eternally binding on men as intelligent creatures, the subjects of their Almighty Creator and Lawgiver; and its demand, therefore, could be nothing else than perfect obedience, or the infliction of the penalty of disobedience.

The giving of the law was thus a new exhibition of the Covenant of Works,—a declaration of what was necessarily incumbent on men if they expected to secure for themselves the favour and fellowship of God. It was a statement of the terms on which

alone God can directly deal with men, if they are to be tried and judged on the strength of their own character and doings. And this new promulgation of the law as a Covenant of Works, the condition on which alone men can attain to life, was alike necessary and seasonable. Though this law was originally written on the heart of man, and though traces of it were still to be found there, as manifest in the dictates of natural conscience passing judgment on their own character and conduct; yet, by the entrance of sin, and the growing degeneracy and corruption of the world, the power of that law to restrain and bind men to obedience was greatly weakened. Mankind had in a great measure lost the knowledge of the true God, of his character and perfections, of the obedience which he required of them, and of the penalty which they incurred if that obedience were withheld. He saw meet, therefore, to assert his sovereignty as the Lawgiver and Judge, by promulgating anew, and in a manner befitting his glorious majesty, that eternal and unchangeable law which must be fulfilled either in a compliance with its demands or in the endurance of its penalty. And he manifested his divine wisdom in the time which he selected for this new promulgation. He had delivered his chosen people from bondage, and brought them unto himself,—he was about to constitute them his visible Church, to be witnesses for him against the idolatry of the world,—and he was to make them, in that capacity, the depositories of his revealed will. He delivered, therefore, to them, and put on record, to be preserved through all future ages, that law which points out the relation in which mankind stand to him as their Sovereign Lawgiver and Judge, and which shows them what they must look for if they reckon on acceptance with God on the ground of their own obedience. To all such that law carries with it condemnation,—the sentence of death. Once it could have given life, and would have done so, had man continued in his first estate. But it can do so no longer, because all have sinned, and judgment has come upon all men to condemnation. It could not, however, on that account be abrogated or altered. Fulfilled it must be, both in its demands and in its penalty, otherwise no sinner can find acceptance with God. This was solemnly proclaimed by the very fact that the law was promulgated from Mount Sinai, as

well as by the manner in which it was there delivered. It was introduced with awful solemnity,—it was spoken by God himself, being the only words which he spoke directly to Israel,—and it was written by his own finger on tables of stone. The unalterable and eternal nature of this law was in like manner asserted in express terms by our Lord himself, when he said, "Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled;" and this truth was solemnly confirmed by his own obedience unto death in the room and on behalf of sinners. God then revealed himself to Israel on Mount Sinai as the Lawgiver; and it was this revelation of his character that constituted the chief glory and grandeur of that transaction. The people did, indeed, tremble when they beheld the thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and when the voice of the trumpet became exceeding loud. But far more terrible still was the voice of God himself; for when he spake to them the words of the ten commandments, they felt their utter unfitness to stand in his presence, and their absolute need of a mediator. "They removed, and stood afar off. And they said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die."

But was the law, then, prescribed to the people of Israel as the Covenant of Works, so as that their acceptance with God absolutely depended on their fulfilling the conditions of that Covenant,—that is, on their perfect obedience to the ten commandments? Assuredly it was not. In itself the law does require perfect obedience, and, as delivered from Mount Sinai, it neither did nor could hold out any hope of mercy. God appeared there only in the character of the just God, the righteous Lawgiver; and Israel, therefore, were overwhelmed with fear and awe, while they contemplated God exclusively in that character. But God had previously revealed himself to them in a way of grace and mercy, of which they were reminded by the words wherewith the ten commandments were introduced: "I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." When Moses was sent down into Egypt to bring Israel up from thence, he was not commissioned to carry in his hand the law of the ten commandments, and to require of the people obedience to that law,

as the condition on which they should be delivered out of the house of their bondage. He went thither to announce God's gracious purpose of delivering them, and to act as his servant or instrument in carrying that purpose into effect. He said nothing of any conditions on their part,—he prescribed to them no law,—he put them upon no lengthened course of obedience as a trial on which their final deliverance was to be suspended. His message was, "The God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, has surely seen your affliction in Egypt, and has heard your cry by reason of your taskmasters; for he knows your sorrows, and he has come down to deliver you out of the hand of the Egyptian, and to bring you up out of that land, unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey."

They were delivered accordingly,—carried in triumph out of the land of their servitude; and it was not until God had visited their oppressors with terrible judgments, borne Israel on eagles' wings, and brought them to himself, that he delivered to them the law, and required them to submit to it as the rule of their future life,—by their obedience to which they were to manifest their gratitude, and to glorify his great name. This deliverance was wrought out in terms of the promise given to, and the covenant made with, Abraham, wherein the faithfulness of God was pledged that Abraham's seed should inherit the land of Canaan, and that in him all the families of the earth should be blessed. And this, again, was just a revelation of the Covenant of Grace,—another and a clearer intimation, in addition to those previously given, that a Saviour had been found, and would in due time be manifested, to bruise the head of the serpent, and to redeem from spiritual captivity the victims of the serpent's artifice. And while the deliverance of Israel themselves was the clearest and most impressive typical representation that had yet been given of the great redemption, the law, as given from Sinai, did plainly set forth what was required for the vindication of God's rectitude and justice before the sinner could be forgiven. It was a law of unalterable, of eternal obligation; and none could be set free from its penalty who did not exhaust its requirements, either himself personally, or by a substitute qualified to do so. It was mainly designed, therefore, to shut up the

people of Israel to a reliance on the Abrahamic Covenant,—that is, the Covenant of Grace,—by showing them how utterly desperate their case would be, if perfect obedience to the law were the only condition on which they could procure or retain the divine favour. They were, indeed, placed under the law at Sinai as a covenant, inasmuch as their future possession of Canaan was suspended on their obedience. When God delivered the law, he declared that he was entitled to impose it as the condition of their continued prosperity and peaceful possession of the land towards which he was conducting them, inasmuch as the law was in itself holy, and just, and good; and when they expressed their willingness to hear and to do all that God required, they declared that they were bound to yield obedience to the law. As often, therefore, as they transgressed, they must have been conscious that they had forfeited their right to the inheritance promised to their fathers; and hence the spirit of bondage, the servile frame of mind, under which Israel were kept, and of which so much is said in the New Testament. But against this severity and rigour of the law they had a merciful relief in the sacrifices which they were encouraged to offer, and through which they received the remission of sins which would otherwise have been a forfeiture of the blessings and privileges of Canaan. But these sacrifices derived all their value and efficacy from the One Great Sacrifice promised from the beginning, even the Seed of the woman that was to bruise the serpent's head, the Descendant of Abraham in whom all the families of the earth were to be blessed. It was to the Gospel, then, as preached in promises and types, that Israel were driven for relief from the inexorable demands of the law, which required perfect obedience, or the infliction of the penalty; and one of the great purposes for which the law was given was that it might be a schoolmaster, shutting men up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed.

This view of the design and tendency of the law is peculiarly applicable to Israel, inasmuch as they were placed under the law as a covenant at Sinai, and thereby, as we have seen, brought under a spirit of bondage. But it is applicable also to men of all countries and all times. The law of God, requiring perfect obedience on pain of death, makes known to mankind the relation in which they naturally stand to him as their Creator, Law-

giver, and Judge; and plainly declares to them what the consequence must be if they resolve on appearing at his judgment-seat on the strength of the satisfaction which they have made to that law, by the virtues of their life and the regularity of their religious observances. The law, it will be observed, says very little about external ceremonies in worship, or mere outward acts of benevolence towards mankind. Even in regard to the second table of the law, where the commandments must of necessity refer to outward manifestations, that table closes with a very solemn declaration that each of the preceding commandments refers to the heart and the affections, and that the law is as really violated by the indulgence of a vindictive, impure, dishonest, or malignant feeling towards a fellow-creature, as when these ungodly desires are embodied in acts of open and gross transgression. The law says, "Thou shalt not steal;" but it says also, "Thou shalt not covet." The law was given forth that men may know this,—that they may be undeceived as to the vain and presumptuous hopes, which they are naturally inclined to cherish, of such an indiscriminating mercy on the part of God as will ever prevent him from really inflicting on the transgressors of his law the penalty which he has threatened. It was given that God may appear to men, what he really is, a God of holiness, rectitude, and truth; and that they may be warned of the utter hopelessness of their condition before God, unless they are prepared to answer to all the demands of that law, and show that they have satisfied these, not merely to such an extent as may have saved them from the reproach, or even gained them the applause and admiration of the world,—but to the full extent of what God requires, and less than which God cannot accept,—even loving Him with all their heart, and loving their neighbour as themselves. There is no room, no authority, for qualifying the demands of the law, by alleging that they have complied with them as far as in their circumstances was possible, or could reasonably be expected. The whole law is reasonable, else God were unjust in propounding it; and to plead, in excuse for transgressions and shortcomings, that it were unreasonable not to make allowance for such defects, is in reality to arraign, not the benevolence only, but the very justice and rectitude of Him who "is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works,"—

who will be justified when he speaketh, and will overcome when he is judged.

While, in giving the law, therefore, God bears testimony to his own character, asserts his sovereignty as Lawgiver, and maintains the honour of his government as the holy and righteous Ruler, he at the same time solemnly warns and admonishes sinners to look somewhere else than to the law for a ground of acceptance with him. And seeing he has, in the same divine record which contains the law, revealed a scheme of grace and mercy, whereby the law is magnified and made honourable, even in the pardon of the guilty, what ought to be the effect of the law itself, when enforcing its claims on the conscience of sinners, but to drive them, as Israel of old were driven, to seek refuge and relief from its rigorous requirements in the righteousness of Him who has fulfilled all its demands,—who has upheld and vindicated its authority,—and by enduring its penalty, as if He had sinned, has demonstrated, in the sight of all God's intelligent creatures, the solemn truth, that heaven and earth shall sooner pass away than any one demand shall pass from the law without being fulfilled? Had the law not been promulgated as it was from Mount Sinai, men would have forgotten how glorious God is,—how holy and just,—how righteous and true,—how greatly to be feared and had in reverence. And if the demands of this law were not still enforced in all their severity and rigour, men would not discover the value of the Gospel; and that which drew forth songs of admiration and praise from the multitude of the heavenly hosts would have brought to the children of men nothing like glad tidings of great joy. It is not less, then, in mercy to mankind, than for the manifestation of his own majesty and glory, that God has revealed his law; and that law is fitted and designed now to be, what it was to Israel of old, even a schoolmaster to bring them to Christ, shutting them up to the faith which has since been revealed.

And such, in point of fact, is the effect of the law in the case of all to whose conscience its claims and its sanction have been brought home, while they had yet no satisfactory evidence of being personally interested in the salvation of Christ. Men may be familiar with both the law and the Gospel as a written record, or as the subject of discussions which they are

accustomed to hear from Sabbath to Sabbath; and yet neither the one nor the other may have touched their heart or stirred their spirit with half the interest which a trifling object of worldly concern has often awakened in their minds. They may have read the law, the words of the ten commandments, those words which overwhelmed Israel with fear and trembling,—they may have read these words a thousand times, without one anxious thought or misgiving, secretly satisfying themselves with the thought that they are not really required to comply with its demands on the pain of incurring condemnation,—that a reasonable allowance will be made for their shortcomings,—and that they may be very safe, and, as to the future, very well, though they have never yielded the obedience which is required, in loving God with all their heart, and loving their neighbours as themselves. And with such views of the law, they will feel but very little concern in the Gospel. If they have seriously considered it at all, it will have served only to confirm them in the delusive opinion that it has modified or relaxed the demands of the law, and that it explains how that law was delivered amidst so many and such awful manifestations of the divine glory, and is nevertheless enforced with so little rigour as to give them no occasion to be afraid of it, though conscious that they have transgressed its requirements and its prohibitions times and ways without number. But when it is brought home to their understanding and conscience by the power of the Spirit of God, whose work it is to convince of sin,—when they are made to feel that the law of God, which is addressed to all who read it, is addressed to them individually, and as pointedly as if there were not another human being but themselves to whom it applied; then they will know and feel that their condition does not differ widely from that of Israel, while standing by Mount Sinai, and hearing the words of the ten commandments spoken by the voice of God. That was, indeed, a very trying state. They were encompassed by barren rocks and a desolate wilderness,—far beyond the reach of any created power to help them,—as entirely and absolutely in the power and at the disposal of God, the Lawgiver and Judge, as if there had not been one living creature beside them on the earth,—and each so occupied with the solemn thought of his own immediate personal transacting with God, as

to be as little disposed as he was able to minister encouragement or comfort to his neighbour.

But not less solitary and helpless is the man on whose conscience the law of God has laid hold,—bringing home to him a charge of guilt which he cannot dispute, and dare not any longer disregard,—proclaiming to him the awful truth that he has sinned, and that the wages of sin is death,—and setting before him the judgment-seat of God, where every man will be dealt with according as his works have been. He will feel then that he is alone with God,—that he cannot, as he once did, take comfort from the thought that his state is not worse or more perilous than that of multitudes around him. He will feel that his condition would not be bettered though every individual of his fellow-men were as guilty and miserable as himself, nor made sensibly worse, though he were the only individual with whom the law of God had any thing to do. He will feel that nothing, in fact, can give him any comfort, or convey to him any peace or consolation, unless he can find wherewithal to answer every one demand of that law. And where is that to be found? In Christ, the Bible says, and says very plainly. But the convicted sinner does not always, at first, see this precious truth in all its meaning. In this respect, his condition may for a time appear still more desolate and helpless than even that of Israel, when they earnestly entreated that there might be a mediator between them and God. The moment they felt their need of such a mediator, their thoughts very naturally turned to Moses; and they accordingly besought him to stand between them and the terrible sight, especially the voice, which had filled them with fear and trembling. "Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die." But the sinner, under a deep conviction of guilt and helplessness, does not always see Christ as readily as Israel saw Moses. Plainly as the Scriptures teach that Christ has fulfilled the law, satisfying its demands, and enduring its penalty on behalf of as many as believe in his name, and freely as the guiltiest of men are invited to take shelter under the Redeemer's righteousness, the awakened sinner is often, for a season, slow to understand and believe this truth. His conscience bears witness to the eternal and unchangeable obligations of the law; for it has fastened upon him a charge of guilt which

he cannot deny, and passed upon him a sentence of condemnation from which he cannot escape. But how the Gospel is to bring him relief, he does not at first see. Accustomed, as he has been, to regard Christ's death as relaxing, or softening down, the rigour of the law, so that it might make allowances for shortcomings and imperfections, and now convinced that this was altogether erroneous, being inconsistent with the very nature of law, he is involved in perplexity and fear, until he discovers that the death of Christ is itself the most solemn and awful demonstration that ever was or can be given of the inexorable nature of the law's demands; inasmuch as Christ died to satisfy these demands, so that God might be just, and yet the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. The clear perception of this truth can alone allay the fears of the convicted sinner. And while the discovery of this truth fills his heart with joy and gladness, sets him free from the bondage of fear, and imparts to him everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, it draws from him a willing homage to the unchangeable nature of the law as a rule of life, inasmuch as from that moment he not only acknowledges his obligation to yield obedience to it, as the authoritative command of the great Lawgiver, but feels himself constrained to obey it, as the revealed will of his gracious Father. Though delivered from the law as a Covenant of Works,—as requiring of him perfect obedience on pain of eternal death,—he does not suppose that the law is abrogated, or its demands relaxed. On the contrary, it is only then that he begins to render the obedience which it requires, even the obedience of love; and to this obedience he sets no limits short of an entire conformity to the image of the Son of God. To be satisfied with less than this, were, in his apprehension, a contradiction; inasmuch as the salvation of Christ, which he has sought, and in the hope of which he rejoices, consists in his being thus transformed into Christ's image; and this transformation begins at the moment when he experiences deliverance from the curse and condemnation of the law, and is transformed into the liberty of the children of God; and it will be completed when Christ appears, and when his people shall be like him, for they shall see him as he is.

XXXIII.

THE BLESSING WHERE GOD RECORDS HIS NAME.

EXODUS XX. 24.

THE promise contained in these words was communicated to Israel through Moses immediately after the promulgation of the law, and a special interest attaches to it from its following so closely on that solemn transaction. When God descended on Mount Sinai, and spoke the ten commandments out of the midst of the fire, of the cloud, and of the thick darkness, with a great voice, he revealed himself to Israel as the Lawgiver, delivering a law which neither did nor could make any allowance for transgression or shortcoming; and the people, conscious that they were altogether unfit to transact immediately with God, and overwhelmed with terror on hearing his voice, removed, and stood afar off, imploring Moses to act as mediator between God and them, saying, "Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die." Moses accordingly did act as mediator, as he had already done, having been appointed to that office by divine authority; and his first act was to allay the fears of the people by assuring them that God had not come to destroy them,—that though they were unfit to abide His presence as the Lawgiver, or to satisfy the demands of His law, yet he had made provision, through a mediator, for conveying to them tokens of His favour, while the law was designed to convince them of their inability to deal immediately with God, as well as to restrain them by the holy fear of sinning against Him: "Fear

not," said he: "for God is come to prove you, and that his fear may be before your faces, that ye sin not." Or, as it is more fully expressed in the book of Deuteronomy, where Moses rehearses the transactions of the solemn season here referred to, "The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken; according to all that thou desiredst of the Lord thy God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God, neither let me see this great fire any more, that I die not. And the Lord said unto me, They have well spoken that which they have spoken. I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him."

Many of the people of Israel, it is to be feared, were, on the occasion of the giving of the law, terrified merely by the outward manifestations of the divine majesty and glory, without any right apprehension of the still more glorious display of the character of God as the Lawgiver, or any clear discernment of the spirituality, rigour, and exceeding breadth of the divine commandment; and all that they wished for, in the way of a mediator, was merely that Moses would at the instant interpose between God and them, that they might be delivered from the immediate cause of their terror,—the fire which had threatened to consume, and the voice of God which had utterly overwhelmed them. But the passage above quoted plainly intimates, I think, that there were others, even a great many, a large proportion, indeed, of those who survived the forty years' wandering, who, though very young at the giving of the law, were impressed with the necessity of more than a temporary mediator between God and man, and whose petition, "Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God, neither let me see this great fire any more, that I die not," expressed far more profound views of the holiness of God on the one hand, and of their own guiltiness on the other, than those did or could entertain who were affected only by the thunderings and lightnings of Mount Sinai. Such is the interpretation which God himself put upon their request; for Moses was commanded to say to them that they had well spoken that which they had

spoken, and that, in accordance with what they had desired, he would raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto Moses, and would put his words into his mouth. This promise, the apostle tells us, was fulfilled in Christ; for after quoting the promise, as that which was truly said by Moses unto the fathers, he adds, as its literal accomplishment, addressing the Jews, "Unto you first, God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities."

Such was the gracious communication which immediately followed the promulgation of the law from Mount Sinai,—the most awful sight which any of the children of men had ever witnessed. It was the renewal, in terms the most explicit, of the promise of a Saviour, long before given, and frequently repeated to the fathers, intimating that one great purpose of the law was to shut them up to a reliance on that promise, by proving, to the conviction of their own conscience, that they had no other ground whereon to rest, inasmuch as, apart from this promise, God was the righteous Lawgiver and Judge only,—a jealous God,—a consuming fire to the transgressors of the law. And this renewed promise of a Mediator, of whom Moses was at the moment a most intelligible and striking type, was accompanied with other manifestations of the divine condescension, as is testified both in the verse under consideration and in the preceding context. We have already seen that one of the purposes for which the law was delivered from Sinai by the voice of God himself, and in the hearing of the whole congregation of Israel, was to shut them up to the faith of the promised Saviour; and, accordingly, that promise was renewed immediately on the people praying that God would deal with them not directly, but through a mediator. But the law was designed also to restrain,—not merely as a perfect rule of life, but as a manifestation of the holiness and rectitude of God, laying upon men an awful and solemn sense of the divine majesty, and of the terrible consequences of the divine displeasure. And so it was employed in this communication made to Moses: "The Lord said unto Moses, Thus thou shalt say unto the children of Israel, Ye have seen that I talked with you from heaven. Ye shall not make with me gods of silver, neither shall ye make unto you gods of gold."

The sin to which Israel were most prone was the sin of idolatry,—the sin, in fact, of fallen human nature, though not manifested in all cases in a manner equally gross and revolting. Against this sin, therefore, the first commandments of the law, necessarily the foundation of all the rest, are directed and enforced, forbidding them to make gods of silver or of gold; and one reason urged for this was that they had seen how that God had talked with them from heaven. This reason is explained in the book of Deuteronomy, where Moses says, "Take ye therefore good heed unto yourselves; for ye saw no manner of similitude on the day that the Lord spake unto you in Horeb out of the midst of the fire: lest ye corrupt yourselves, and make you a graven image." But God condescended to inculcate this first and great commandment in a manner still more affecting when he said, "An altar of earth thou shalt make unto me, and shalt sacrifice thereon thy burnt-offerings, and thy peace-offerings, thy sheep, and thine oxen." Such an altar, they might have been disposed to think, would be altogether unworthy of the service of Him of whose majesty and greatness they had just witnessed so glorious a display; and they might have been ready, therefore, to adopt some more gorgeous and imposing mode of worship, as worthier of the divine perfections, and more acceptable in his sight. In great condescension, therefore, as well as in great mercy to them, he required that their altars should be constructed of the most common and least costly materials. He thereby plainly intimated, in a very gracious manner, what the law in all its terrible majesty was designed to inculcate, that they had nothing wherewith to purchase the divine favour,—nothing to offer that was in itself worthy of his regard. And he did also thereby teach them that the simplest worship, if offered in spirit and in truth, and in the exercise of faith in the great Atonement, which was visibly exhibited in their sacrifices, would assuredly be accepted; for the command to erect to him altars of earth only, or of unhewn stone, was followed up by the gracious promise,—"In all places where I record my name, I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee."

But after issuing such a command, and adding to it such a promise, it may perhaps appear strange that God should have given instructions for the erection of the tabernacle in the wil-

derness, and at a future period authorised the building of the temple at Jerusalem,—in both of which a prescribed ritual was observed, which for costliness and splendour far exceeded any thing which human wisdom and wealth had ever contrived or executed; at the same time selecting one place wherein to record his name, and to which Israel were required, generally, to bring their burnt-offerings, and their peace-offerings, and where they were to sacrifice their sheep and their oxen. It is to be remembered, however, that the erection of the tabernacle and the temple was designed for other and very important purposes besides that of providing a place where the people of Israel might offer sacrifices. It was designed to set forth the glory of Christ's person and mediatorial work,—to illustrate his office as the great High Priest of his Church,—to exhibit a shadow or pattern of heavenly things; and, in this point of view, it forms the main topic of the Epistle to the Hebrews, in which the apostle discourses at large on these sublime subjects. But even in regard to the children of Israel, the erection of the tabernacle, and afterwards of the temple, and the law whereby sacrifices were restricted to the place which God did choose to put his name there, was designed and did directly tend to preserve them from idolatry,—to enforce the very commandment enjoined in the context.

It appears from the subsequent history of Israel, that even in spite of all the restraints, both of mercy and of judgment, which were laid upon them, they were perpetually falling into this heinous sin of idolatry. They were in no condition to be satisfied with the simple and spiritual worship prescribed in the passage under consideration, wherein they were commanded to erect altars of earth only, or of unhewn stones; and of this we have a melancholy proof in their making to themselves gods of gold, ere yet the cloud and thick darkness in which God was had been removed from Mount Sinai. The erection of the tabernacle, then, as well as the restriction of sacrifices to one place, was a very merciful ordination to them. The splendour and magnificence of the tabernacle itself were such as it would have been alike vain and sinful in them to attempt to imitate,—the pattern being furnished by God himself, and the work being executed by men whom he filled with his spirit, "in wisdom, and in understand-

ing, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship." They were thus drawn away from idolatry by the display of beauty and grandeur which it was impossible for them to imitate, especially when we reflect that there the symbol of God's presence rested, which it had been alike idle and presumptuous in them to expect anywhere else. And this gracious method of weaning them from idolatrous worship was accompanied by an express command that they should offer sacrifices only in the place which God had chosen to put his name there.

But all these restrictions and limitations do not affect the singular manifestation of the divine grace and condescension presented in the passage before us. There Israel were assured that He was willing that they should enjoy as ready and as frequent access to his presence, and receive as unequivocal tokens of their acceptance with him, as Abraham did, who was wont, in every place where he took up his abode, to build an altar, and call on the name of the Lord, being a stranger to those restrictions which were afterwards laid on his posterity by the Mosaic law, and which gendered a servile frame of spirit. It was plainly intimated to them that spiritual worship, however simple in its outward form, was that which God required, and which he was ready at all times and in all places to accept. And, accordingly, even after the restriction as to place was imposed,—being added, like every other precept of the law, because of transgression,—he was graciously pleased, on various occasions, to permit his servants to erect altars and to offer sacrifices; at the same time giving them the assurance that there he had recorded his name, by fulfilling the promise in the verse before us, in coming to them and blessing them. So he dealt with Gideon, with Manoah, with Samuel, with David, and with others. And this promise, let us remember, was given immediately after the law had been delivered, while yet the tokens of God's majesty and glory as the Lawgiver were before their eyes,—thereby plainly intimating that their acceptance with God and their enjoyment of his favour rested on an entirely different ground from their obedience to the law,—even on Him who had been promised to Abraham, and in whom all the families of the earth are to be blessed.

It can hardly fail, I think, to occur to every devout mind, that the time and circumstances in which this promise was given

do place in a very affecting light the grace and the mercy of God. Had Israel been impressed with the law as they ought to have been, and as we cannot doubt many of them were,—had they seen its spirituality, rigour, and extent, as reaching to the very thoughts and desires of the heart,—and had they felt how guilty they already were, and how unable they would be in time coming to comply with its demands,—they would have been brought under a feeling of dread, far more profound than any that could be awakened by the terrible appearances which accompanied its promulgation. And we have seen, I think, sufficient reason to believe that there were many who thus felt, and who were, therefore, thrown into a state of great perplexity and spiritual distress. How welcome, then, must have been the communication which Moses brought to them, when the Lord commanded him to say, "They have well spoken that which they have spoken: I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee!" And what enlargement and relief must they not have experienced when Moses added, "In all places where I record my name, I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee!" The expression, "Name of God," refers, I think, to Christ, of whom it is said in a subsequent chapter, "My name is in him;" and recording this name in any place, I understand especially to mean God's permitting or commanding a sacrifice to be offered in that place,—sacrifice being the most striking representation of Christ,—indeed exclusively designed to represent him. How marvellous, then, was the manifestation of God's grace, condescension, and tenderness towards such of the people of Israel as were truly convicted of guilt, and broken in their mind! No sooner had the law with its rigour and terrors taken possession of their minds, and constrained them to implore the interposition of a mediator between God and them, than he granted them their request, by renewing his promise of Christ, in some respects in clearer and more definite terms than had yet been vouchsafed even to the patriarchs themselves; and this promise he followed up by an assurance, that wherever they offered a sacrifice with his permission, and according to the prescribed order, he would come to them and bless them.

And how precious should this promise still be to all who are under convictions of guilt and the apprehension of coming

wrath, and who feel how utterly impossible it is for them to satisfy the demands of a law which they have already violated, and by which they are condemned! It is now, as it was at Sinai, and ever has been, the design and work of the law, when enforced on the conscience by the power of the Spirit of God, thus to convict of guilt and convince of sin; and this work it will accomplish in every individual who is taught of the Spirit. But this work being done,—sinners being thus awakened to a sense of their sin and misery, and being made willing to betake themselves to the refuge which God has provided,—it is no part of the design or work of the law to interpose between them and that refuge, or to prevent them from entering it. It is the very opposite. The law is intended and fitted to bring them to Christ,—to shut them up to the faith of the Gospel; and when they have been persuaded and enabled to flee for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before them there, the law is magnified and made honourable in them, inasmuch as then they are clothed with a righteousness in the eye of the law, which their own unsinning obedience never could have wrought out. It is not the revealed will of God, therefore, that broken and contrite souls should remain in a state of darkness and spiritual depression, with the burden of guilt on their conscience, and the terrors of the law in their heart. We are warranted, by the gracious procedure of God himself, as recorded in the passage before us, to hold out to all such the precious truth, that while God is revealed in his law in all the majesty and glory of his character as the righteous Lawgiver, he is at the same instant manifesting himself in Jesus Christ as the Lord God, merciful and gracious, forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin, and to tell them that the very purpose of the law is to persuade them to accept of the overtures of his grace. Never had sinners greater reason to be overwhelmed with a sense of their own guilt, and with the inexorable demands of the divine law, than those had who heard that law promulgated amidst the fire and the thick darkness of Sinai. Yet who can doubt that those who on that occasion were the most deeply impressed with its holy and spiritual character, and were, therefore, the most feelingly alive to their own unworthiness, were just those whose hearts were enlarged and whose spirits were refreshed by the gracious

assurance contained in the words under consideration, coming from the Lawgiver himself. They saw Christ, indeed, only in types and figures, and they could not, therefore, perceive the depth of meaning implied in God's recording his name in the place where such sacrifices were offered; but they saw enough to deliver them from their terror and dismay in the gracious promise, "In all places where I record my name, I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee."

We have already seen that, subsequently to the period at which this promise was made, the people of Israel, for wise, and, to themselves, gracious purposes, were restricted, generally, to one place for the offering of their sacrifices. I say generally; for exceptions were allowed, and in all cases where they were so allowed, this promise was fulfilled in their experience. Their sacrifice was accepted,—God gave testimony that he had recorded his name there,—he came unto them, and blessed them. But such restriction no longer exists. The promise has revived in all its fulness, or rather has been renewed and extended beyond any thing that the Old Testament Church knew or could have conceived of; inasmuch as Christ has said, and recorded the precious declaration, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." The declaration is at once solemn and encouraging. It is very solemn, and, if seriously considered, sufficient to carry terror and dismay to the hearts of multitudes; for multitudes, it is to be feared, professedly meet together in the name of Christ,—that is, to join together in Christian worship,—who have never really desired nor expected practically to know that Christ is in the midst of them. They would not be very willing, I dare say, to admit that they are not Christian worshippers,—that they are not approaching God in the name of Christ,—and that they have not good ground to hope that their religious services will be accepted for Christ's sake. But if it be so that they are worshipping in spirit and in truth, and in the exercise of faith in Christ, then they are gathered together in his name; and if they are gathered together in his name, then assuredly Christ is in the midst of them,—for so he has declared in the plainest and most unequivocal terms. Nor has he left it in doubt in what sense and for what purpose it is that he is thus

present with them. He is with them by his Spirit in his Word and ordinances; and the work of the Spirit, by means of that Word and these ordinances, is to enlighten the minds of the worshippers,—to take of the things of Christ and show them unto their souls,—to reprove or to comfort them, as their condition may require,—to help their infirmities in prayer, teaching them how to pray, and what to pray for,—to bring them to God by that way of access which has been opened up through Christ,—and to impart to them that liberty and boldness whereby they can make known all their wants, and that sense of their nearness to God whereby they have good ground to believe that their fellowship has been with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.

If men are conscious, then, that they never earnestly desired nor seriously expected to have the practical experience of all or any of these intimations of Christ's presence in the meetings of his professed worshippers, it is plain that they have never been gathered together in the name of Christ, in such a sense as to be partakers of the promise that he will come unto them and bless them. Perhaps they would find, did they carefully examine their hearts, that so far from having ever felt any desire to meet with Christ in the assemblies of his people and in the observance of his ordinances, they would be alarmed at the thought of so meeting him,—afraid of being brought under such convictions of sin as would compel them to make an interest in his salvation their chief concern, the one thing needful,—and unwilling to feel themselves laid under such a weight of obligation to him as would constrain them to forego whatever they should discover to be offensive to him. Their service, then, however decently and seriously gone about as to outward demeanour, can only be the service of the formalist,—a drawing near unto God with the mouth, and an honouring him with the lips, while the heart is far from him; there being no distinct recognition of their dependence on Him who is the way, and the truth, and the life, and through whom alone sinners can have access unto God. I say nothing of the sin of this formality, which the Scriptures have denounced as a very heinous sin in the sight of God; but I cannot help remarking, what is a very solemn consideration, that if in the place where such formalists are accustomed to assemble,

there be even two or three gathered together with the desire and the hope of meeting Christ in his ordinances, then Christ is there,—there, to bless as many as truly desire to be blessed,—but in a very different way in respect of those who neither ask nor care for his blessing. To them he is present in the character in which he is represented in Scripture, when it is said of him, in reference to the churches of Asia, that he "walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks,"—that he is "the faithful and the true witness,"—that he hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire,—that all the churches shall know that it is he who searcheth the reins and hearts,—and that he will give unto every one according to his works.

But while the promise we are considering, as renewed under the Gospel, contains a very solemn warning to formalists,—mere nominal Christians,—it is equally full of encouragement and consolation to every humble and sincere believer. It is now true, as it was under the law, that in all places where God records his name, he will come unto his people and bless them,—with this gracious extension of the promise, that wherever the finished work of Christ is set forth to the faith and hope of sinners, and is by them embraced and relied on, there is one of the places where God records his name, and where he will come and bless his people. In their secret chamber, therefore, where they read and meditate on the Saviour's work,—in the family circle, where they unite in offering the tribute of their gratitude and praise,—in the intercourse with Christian friends, when Christ and his salvation form the subject of their devout converse,—and in the assemblies of the saints, where they meet, in a still more solemn and public manner, for the stated worship of God;—in all these places they are encouraged to look for the fulfilment of the promise in the passage under review. But it is to the last, the public meeting of the saints, that the promise is especially given. It was said, in regard to the Old Testament Church, "The Lord loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob." And our Lord's promise, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them," evidently refers, I think, in an especial manner, to places of public worship, as does the statement of the apostle also when he says, "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is."

With true Christians this will ever be a very solemn consideration, that in going up to the house of God, they go to meet Christ, and to receive his blessing. Perhaps they may recollect occasions on which they have thought but too little of this,—occasions on which they have both entered and left the house of God in a state very different from that humble, teachable, and subdued frame of spirit, with which it becomes them to wait on Christ in the place where he has especially promised to come to them and to bless them. And to this want of due preparedness for waiting on God in his ordinances may be ascribed the manifold disappointments which they have experienced in not finding the comfort and the consolation which they looked for in the service of the sanctuary.

Certainly such disappointments are not to be ascribed to any thing in the promise itself. That promise is as sure as it is large. When Christ says that he will be in the midst of his people,—that he will come to them and bless them,—there is and can be no condition to which the promise does not apply, and none in which it will not be fulfilled, if they have faith to receive the fulfilment. Are they depressed and cast down by a sense of their guiltiness and sin, anxious to make confession of all their offences, and earnestly desiring to have some ground of hope that their transgression is forgiven, that their sin is covered, and that the Lord imputeth not iniquity to them?—then it is in the house of God that they may especially reckon on experiencing consolation and relief. Have they been for a season in a state of declension, because they have left their first love, and become entangled in some worldly snare?—it is in the assembly of the saints, and under the preaching of the Word, that they are most likely to be quickened to a sense of their sin, and brought back in penitence and faith to Him from whom they had gone astray, and who by His Word and Spirit recalls them from their wandering. Have they been visited with many and sore trials, under which nothing but a divine consolation could sustain them?—they will, I doubt not, be ready to acknowledge that it was while they were drawing near to God in his ordinances that he drew near to them, speaking a word to their souls when they were weary, unfolding to them the tenderness of that compassionate Saviour, who is touched with a feeling of their infirmities, and so reconciling

them to the divine dispensations, as not only just and right, but as gracious and good. Whatever may have been the experience of believers, their recollections of all that is most interesting in their spiritual history will in most cases, I believe, be associated with the house of God, the assemblies of the people, the place where he has recorded his name. In not a few instances, indeed, it will be found that there they were first apprehended of Christ, while in a state of great formality and indifference; and there, at all events, they have found not a little of the consolation and encouragement which have enabled them to go on their way rejoicing. They can from their own experience, therefore, in some measure understand and sympathise with the Psalmist's earnest longings after the house of God; and the more steadily that they are advancing in the divine life, the more ready will they be to say, "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord;" "for a day spent in thy courts is better than a thousand."

XXXIV.

THE WORDS OF GOD WRITTEN IN A BOOK.

EXODUS XXIV. 4.

THE verse before us marks a very memorable era in the history, not only of the people of Israel, but of the Church of Christ,—namely, the commencement of a written record of God's revealed will. From the beginning, the Church had never been without a revelation of the gracious purposes of God for the salvation of sinners through a Redeemer; for even in the garden of Eden, an intimation was given of these purposes in the hearing of our guilty first parents,—an intimation so full and expressive, that we find the last of the sacred writers, the apostle John, whose works close the canon of Scripture, summing up the subject of the Gospel almost in the very words in which it was first announced to Adam and Eve. To them it was declared, not indeed in the form of a direct promise, but in the judgment pronounced on the arch-enemy who had deceived them, that the seed of the woman should bruise the head of the serpent; in other words, that One born of a woman should defeat the scheme and destroy the work of him who had involved man in guilt and misery, apparently beyond the reach of recovery. And the apostle John, —he who of all the apostles was favoured with the largest and most profound discoveries of the glory of Christ's person, and character, and mediatorial work,—thus sets forth the great purpose for which Christ was made of a woman, made under the law: "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil."

How far our first parents, and their children for many generations, understood the promise involved in the judgment pronounced upon the devil, I cannot of course determine; but every child now, who has been instructed in the first principles of the oracles of God, must see that the promise indirectly made to our first parents comprehends all that the last of the apostles states, in expressing in one sentence the great purpose of the incarnation, sufferings, and death of the only-begotten Son of God. The promise says, "The seed of the woman shall bruise the head," crush or destroy the power, "of the serpent," the devil: the apostle says, "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil." The Gospel, therefore, was preached to our fallen race even from the beginning; and we know that it was effectual for the salvation of multitudes, though we do not know and cannot estimate the extent to which they saw and understood in what way it was that they were to be ransomed from the power of the tempter, who had seduced them into sin and involved them in ruin.

But this promise, and all the subsequent revelations whereby it was illustrated and confirmed, were handed down from generation to generation, for a period of two thousand five hundred years, only by tradition. Many, indeed, and large were the additions which were made to the original promise during that period. The institution of sacrifice,—the acceptance of Abel's offering and rejection of Cain's,—the translation of Enoch,—the preservation of Noah amidst the universal destruction of the human race,—the renewal of the promise made to him in the form of a covenant, confirmed or ratified by the appointment of the rainbow as a pledge on the part of God for its fulfilment,—the call of Abraham,—the still plainer repetition to the patriarch of the promise of a Saviour, who was to descend from him according to the flesh, confirmed by a subsidiary promise or covenant, whereby Canaan was given to him and to his children after him,—the communications vouchsafed to Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph,—the predictions which they were moved by the Holy Ghost to deliver,—and, finally, the redemption of the people of Israel from the bondage of Egypt;—all these were designed and fitted to throw light on the original promise; and, viewed in connection with the ordinance of sacrifice, they did place in a

very clear light the efficacy of the great Atonement which was one day to be offered, and in virtue of which God could, consistently with his rectitude and truth, deal with sinners in a way of grace and mercy. But the promise itself, as well as the various communications whereby it was confirmed and its meaning unfolded, had been preserved in the Church only by tradition,—that is, by oral communication from one generation to another; and when it is said, therefore, in the verse under consideration, that after telling the people all the commandments and judgments of the Lord, Moses wrote all the words of the Lord,—and, in a subsequent verse, that he took the book of the covenant which he had thus written, and read it in the audience of the people,—every one must see that the occasion was a very solemn one to the people of Israel, and a very memorable one to the Church in all subsequent times. It was the commencement of that authoritative record of the divine will, which continued to receive additions, by the immediate revelation of the Holy Spirit, through a space of more than fifteen hundred years,—a record which has survived, in its purity and integrity, all the efforts of the enemy of truth and righteousness to destroy or corrupt it,—and which has been, and will continue to be, the great instrument, in the hands of the Holy Spirit, for convincing and converting sinners, and building them up in holiness and comfort through faith unto salvation.

I have said that with regard to the people of Israel, the occasion here referred to must have been a very solemn one. And the ground of the remark is obvious. Moses, we are told, wrote all the words of the Lord; and the book which he so wrote is called, in a subsequent verse, "the book of the covenant." I infer, therefore, that the commandments formed part of this book, because these commandments constituted the terms of the covenant into which God entered with Israel at Sinai,—the terms to which he took them bound, on the pain of forfeiting and losing the possession of Canaan, on which they were about to enter. Now, it is recorded of the people, that, before the ten commandments were spoken by God from Mount Sinai, they declared their willingness and their purpose to hear and to do all that the Lord should speak. In like manner, when, in addition to the ten commandments, Moses had received the special laws

recorded in the preceding three chapters, and had told the people all the words of the Lord, and all the judgments, the whole people answered with one voice, and said, "All the words which the Lord hath said will we do." When Moses, therefore, committed to writing the commandments which the people had thus pledged themselves to observe and obey,—and "rose up early in the morning, and builded an altar under the hill, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel, and . . . . . offered burnt-offerings, and sacrificed peace-offerings of oxen unto the Lord," "and took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people," "and took the blood and sprinkled it on the people, and said, Behold the blood of the covenant, which the Lord hath made with you concerning all these words,"—how awfully solemn must it have been to them to see recorded, and put into a permanent form, the solemn engagement under which they had come to hear and to do all that the Lord had commanded! By the writing of that book, they were solemnly warned that their vow was registered, and could not be forgotten,—that there would be no room for pleading, at a future period, that they did not remember all that, in a moment of fear and agitation, they had bound themselves to do,—that the precise terms of their covenant with God were now permanently recorded,—and that by these terms they should be judged and dealt with.

In illustration of this, let us make a supposition applicable to ourselves. Let us only suppose that all the good purposes which we have entertained,—all the holy resolutions which we have formed,—all the confessions of sin which we have made, in seasons of spiritual depression, when conscience was busy in gathering up and setting before us long-forgotten transgressions, —all the supplications for pardon which at such seasons we have poured out,—and all the vows which our lips uttered when trouble lay upon us;—let us only suppose that all these had been recorded by the infallible dictation of the Spirit of God, and that they were presented to us as stipulations or engagements to which God holds us solemnly bound; and then we may conceive somewhat of the reverence and holy awe with which every thinking Israelite must have seen and listened to Moses, while he read from the book of the covenant all the

words which they had once and again pledged themselves to obey. And it appears that they were very deeply impressed; for not only did they repeat their former declaration that they would do all that the Lord had said, but they added, evidently in a subdued frame of spirit, that they would be submissive: "They said, All that the Lord hath said will we do, and be obedient."

But to the believing and the devout of the people of Israel,—those who saw, in the promise of a Saviour, and in the typical representation of him which was set forth in sacrifice, a relief from the inexorable demands of the law as a Covenant of Works,—to all such, the writing of the words of the Lord by Moses, while a very solemn transaction, must have been full also of encouragement and comfort. It was a new pledge, and one of a different kind from any which they had hitherto received, of the permanency of their relation to God as his people, of the stability of that Church state into which he had formed them. They could not, indeed, foresee the extent to which the record of the divine will, then commenced, was to be carried by successive additions, through many subsequent generations; but from the day on which Moses wrote the words of the Lord in a book, they were privileged as no other nation had ever been, inasmuch as then they were honoured to be the depositories of divine truth, the keepers of the holy oracles of God. And to this honourable distinction we find repeated reference in Scripture, as a privilege of inestimable value, and as carrying with it a very solemn responsibility. "Keep therefore," said Moses, towards the close of his life, "keep therefore and do the statutes and judgments of the Lord; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the Lord our God is in all things that we call upon him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?" And the apostle Paul, in answer to the question, "What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision?" says, "Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God."

But the statement here recorded in the verse under consideration is full of interest and instruction to the Church at large, and in all ages. I need not dwell on the obvious and immeasurable superiority of a written record of truth over a system of the same truth committed to tradition, and communicated orally from one generation to another,—especially a system of divine truth revealed to fallen and sinful creatures, whose aversion to it would constantly operate against both its permanency and purity. In any circumstances, therefore, the grace and goodness of God would have been manifested in commanding that the revelation of his will should be committed to writing. This, it is true, would not of itself have secured the permanent purity, or even the existence of that revelation; for there is enmity enough in the carnal mind against God to have long ago corrupted, or altogether destroyed his Word, if it had not been in safer keeping than mere human guardianship; and there is nothing, perhaps, in which the overruling providence of God is more illustriously displayed, and his sovereignty more clearly asserted, than in the preservation of a Book, and that too in its purity, which encounters an enemy in every human breast, till, by its own holy truths, wielded as the sword of the Spirit of God, the enmity of that breast is slain, and the love of these truths established there in righteous supremacy over the heart and affections.

Still, however, it was, and in any circumstances would have been a striking manifestation of the grace and condescension of God, to command that his will should be put on record. But a special interest attaches to this ordination when viewed in connection with another dispensation in God's dealings with the children of men,—a dispensation with which, I think, we can hardly avoid connecting it,—I mean the shortening of human life. The history of the first ages of the world affords melancholy evidence, that though, in consequence of the lengthened period to which the lives of men were extended, the revelation of divine mercy, as comprehended in the first promise, and illustrated by the institution of sacrifice, might have come down to the time of Abraham,—a period of more than two thousand years,—without passing through more than four individuals before reaching the patriarch; yet, during the greater part of

that time, and even from a very early period, divine revelation, though very simple and easily remembered, was either grievously corrupted or universally disregarded. And what, without a constant miracle, would have been the consequence if during that period human life had been as short as it now is,—when, in one-tenth part of the time, the history of the fall, and the gracious intimation of the recovery which Adam lived nearly a thousand years to relate, might have been buried in oblivion, or so perverted and disfigured, as traditionary histories are wont to be, that it might not have contained so much of divine truth as that the knowledge of it could have been saving? Nothing but a continuation of new direct communications, so far as we can perceive, would have preserved among men the truth which it is most important for them to know and believe. And it appears that, subsequently to the second great and almost universal defection of mankind after the flood, when the knowledge of the true God was apparently on the point of being extinguished, and when the life of man was considerably shortened, divine communications were multiplied, as we may infer, I think, from the history of Abraham and his posterity. It was for the revival of His cause in an already revolted and rapidly-degenerating world, that God called the patriarch, and so ordered his lot and that of his posterity as to render them witnesses for him, and promulgators of his truth, to an extent which no man could have anticipated or conceived.

But, in the meantime, human life, it would appear, continued gradually to be shortened. Abraham died at the age of an hundred and seventy-five,—Isaac, at an hundred and eighty,—Jacob, at an hundred and forty-seven,—and Joseph, at an hundred and ten. But about the time referred to in the passage under consideration, the life of man generally was reduced to its present standard; for in the ninetieth Psalm, which was written by Moses, it is said, "The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away." And this was the point of time which God, in his grace and wisdom, was pleased to select for giving to the revelation of his will a more permanent form than it had yet possessed; and in doing so he has furnished one among many proofs

of his condescension and mercy, in adapting his dealings to the circumstances and condition of men, making it manifest that he has no pleasure in the death of sinners, but that he will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.

But in thus contemplating the grace, as well as the wisdom of God, in selecting the time which he did for recording in a permanent form the revelation of his will, we must not regard his command for so doing in the light of a compensation for a loss which mankind had sustained,—as if the shortening of human life was in itself an evil or injury, for which it might have been expected that some reparation would be granted, though, perhaps, it could not as matter of right be claimed. However unwilling men may be to admit it, yet it cannot be denied that the length of human life was reduced in great mercy to mankind. It is plain, I think, beyond all dispute, that the long life of the first generations of men served only to harden them in sin, and embolden them in presumptuous rebellion against God; for in no other way can we account for the universal violence with which the earth was filled,—a violence so aggravated and unrestrained that it became morally necessary, for the manifestation of God's sovereignty and rectitude, in the sight not of men only, but of his whole intelligent creation, to visit it with the terrible judgment of the deluge. No doubt, the protracted life of man, as it was in the first ages of the world, was a very clear manifestation of the forbearance and long-suffering patience of God; and it would have proved a very great blessing had men been inclined to improve it. Every thing was done to prevent them forgetting or corrupting the revelation of divine grace and mercy which had been vouchsafed to them. That revelation consisted, so far as we can gather from the divine record, of the covenant made with Adam,—the judgment pronounced upon him in consequence of breaking that covenant,—the promise involved in the sentence passed upon the serpent,—the illustration of the import of that promise in the institution of sacrifice,—and the history of Cain and Abel; whereby men were taught, in a way too plain, it might be thought, to be misunderstood, how they might find acceptance with God. A written record was not necessary to preserve a revelation so short, so simple, and so explicit, had men been inclined to believe and promulgate it. But to pre-

vent, if possible, their carelessness, or even their ungodliness, from corrupting or allowing it to fall into oblivion, the very person to whom the revelation was made, and who of all the human race might be supposed to feel the deepest interest in it, was spared for nearly a thousand years, during which he might have spent his strength in proclaiming among his posterity how he and they had fallen into sin and misery, and in telling them how his son Abel, and himself, perhaps, had found pardon, peace, and reconciliation with God.

And then, what lessons of practical wisdom might not men generally have learned in the course of a life extending to hundreds of years! All that time they were, as we are, labouring under the solemn and irreversible sentence, "Cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." If, in the ardour of youth, they might look forward with lively hopes and expectations to the success of one or other of their manifold schemes, whereby to secure a permanent and satisfying portion, yet the experience of one hundred years, to say nothing of nearly a thousand, might have taught them that however fertile their ingenuity might be in devising new schemes of enjoyment, yet in the sentence passed upon man as a sinner, and in the curse pronounced upon the ground for his sake, there were bound up inexhaustible stores of disappointments, vexations, and crosses, whereby the most promising of their schemes would infallibly be disappointed, and they would be made to feel that there was no escape from the decree whereby they were doomed to a life of toil and sore travail, to terminate at last in death. And with this experience, it might have been expected that they would gladly have sought rest in the promise, which, however short they might come of understanding its full import, had, in connection with sacrifice, imparted peace to Abel, and enabled him to die in the faith and hope of a better life. One thing, at least, is clear, that this protracted life of man, viewed in connection with the circumstances to which I have referred, bore testimony to the forbearance and long-suffer-

ing patience of God, and put to a most decisive test the character of man, proving him, and showing what was and still is in his heart. And the result of the experiment, which, in the marvellous forbearance of God, was thus made, he has himself recorded, namely, that "because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil."

It is plain, therefore, that from the corruption and perverseness of mankind, whereby a long life ministered only to the daringness of their rebellion against God, the shortening of that life was an act of mercy, and might prove an unspeakable blessing. It is an act of mercy, not only in affording them a shorter time for the heart to become hardened through the deceitfulness of sin, but in furnishing a very powerful motive whereby they may be persuaded to abandon the pursuit of lying vanities, which at the very best, and on the most favourable supposition, can yield them but a short-lived gratification. The question now is between threescore and ten years,—even if men could reckon upon so much, which they cannot,—I say the question, the competition, if I may so speak, is between that and eternity,—a consideration which, with every thinking man, should be sufficient to reduce the things of time to absolute nothingness, when they interfere with what is spiritual and eternal. The divine ordination, therefore, whereby human life was reduced from nearly a thousand years to threescore and ten, was at once most merciful to the world, and most gracious to the Church,—manifesting the care and tenderness of Him who is her glorious Head, and who from the beginning has held the administration of all things that concern her well-being for time and eternity. But how is that grace magnified and displayed by the fact, that with this shortening of human life he vouchsafed at the same time a written record of his will, of his revelation of mercy, whereby his people might be fully instructed, even within the period of their shortened pilgrimage, in all that it was most necessary for them to know and believe!

The grace and mercy of this dispensation are so clearly manifested in the case of Israel, that none can fail to see and acknowledge them. They were about to enter on a rich temporal inheritance; and if they had gone thither with any reasonable prospect of enjoying it for hundreds of years, what may we sup-

pose would have been the effect, knowing what we do know of their tendency to forget every thing but what was carnal and earthly? And how gracious and merciful, then, the ordination whereby they entered on that inheritance, with the testimony of experience, and the recorded warning of Moses in the ninetieth Psalm, that threescore and ten years were to be the limit of their enjoyment, inasmuch as if life should be protracted to fourscore, Canaan itself would yield them only "labour and sorrow."

But does not the remark apply equally, nay, still more forcibly to ourselves? On the one hand, we have less security than Israel had,—a great deal less security for the enjoyment of a temporal possession; and, on the other hand, we have an incalculably clearer revelation of a future and eternal inheritance; while, in regard to the length of life, the reasonable expectation of many days, we are in no respect better than they were. Do we, then, in truth and sincerity, believe and feel that the shortening of human life, as compared with what it was in the first ages of the world, and the recording of divine revelation in a distinct and permanent form, are both blessings,—that the one is not to be viewed as a compensation for the other,—that both are fitted, as well as designed, to impress us with the necessity of making it our chief object to secure an interest in the heavenly inheritance as the one thing needful, and to be brought into a state of preparedness for enjoying it? With regard to those who are seeking their chief good in the present life, and who, if they think of future things at all, think of them only as evils, or at least as things which they will endeavour to make the best of when all other sources of enjoyment are dried up,—with regard to such persons, there is no doubt as to what their sentiments are. They must look on the shortening of human life as an evil; for they would willingly "live alway," having no desire and no capacity for the enjoyment of any thing better than what this world affords. So far from seeing any mercy in their life being limited to threescore years and ten, they would be willing that it should be extended to a thousand, and would complain that it is not so, were it not that the experience of almost countless generations testifies how useless, and absurd, and idle it were to give way to any such murmuring. Even such persons, indeed, may be so wearied out with the vain pursuit and disappointed hope of happiness as to be willing to die, ready to say, "I would

not live alway." But it would not be from any hope or desire of a better, a holier, and therefore a happier life; but from mere satiety with the present,—a feeling as infidel and ungodly as any by which they have ever been actuated. Yet, whether they will believe it or not, the shortening of human life is a mercy even to them. It circumscribes their guilt to a degree that cannot be estimated.

But are Christians, true believers, who are really looking to heaven as their home and their inheritance,—are they as feelingly and as habitually alive as they ought, in consistency with their profession, to be to the grace and mercy of God, both in reducing the life of man to its present standard, and in placing on permanent record the revelation of his will for the salvation of sinners? I do not doubt that, on sober and serious reflection, they will admit that both are very gracious dispensations, and that if they had had any thing like a reasonable prospect of living three hundred, instead of threescore years, they might yet have been in the same state of carelessness and carnal security in which Christ apprehended, and from which he has delivered them. But do they always live and act under the influence of this truth? Do they never find, on serious self-examination, that they have been living as if they would have no objections to live here always? Do they never forget how short life is, to the effect of losing opportunities of doing good, which a vivid sense of their frailty and mortality would have prompted them to embrace? And have they not found such a tendency in their minds to put off the thought of death, and to reckon on still another and another year, as is sufficient to explain how it is that men, even under the shortened period of present existence, may be as eager in the pursuit of earthly enjoyments as if their life were to be prolonged to the utmost extent which we find recorded? There may be circumstances in which even Christians may wish, in submission to the divine will, that their life should be protracted. Paul himself was in a strait whether to choose life or death; and long life is promised to the observance of the fifth commandment. But, independently of such circumstances, do they not sometimes feel a clinging to life for the sake of life's enjoyments, without any regard to what a protracted life might enable them to do for the glory of God, and for the good of their families and their fellow-men? And if they find on examina-

tion that such is the natural tendency of their hearts, does it not furnish a very striking and conclusive testimony to the grace as well as the wisdom of God, in having circumscribed human life within its present limits? and does it not exhibit in a very affecting light the same grace in providing so richly for their being prepared to enter on a better?

The grace and wisdom of God's ordination cannot be denied. He has so limited the present life that every thinking man must see it to be as nothing, compared with that eternal state on which all must soon enter; and he has fully revealed the way to eternal life, so that all may enter upon it the moment they read or hear the glad tidings of the Gospel. If, therefore, men are, notwithstanding all this, making the present life their chief concern, spending their thoughts and their strength on schemes for increasing their wealth and extending their influence, anxious mainly about standing well with the world, and fretting themselves when they fail of securing the place and the consideration which they aimed at,—putting away from them the thought of death, and, when the subject is forced upon them by the Word of God, or by some sudden visitation of his providence, labouring to get rid of their fears by contriving to persuade themselves that there was something peculiar in the case of those whose death for a moment alarmed them, which does not apply to them; —if such be the character and conduct of many, even of some who profess to believe the Gospel, and to be looking forward to an heavenly inheritance, it proves only the deceitfulness of the human heart, and the miserable deception which men will practise upon themselves even in what concerns their eternal interests, and where disappointment is utterly irremediable. But it does not affect the wisdom and the grace of God as manifested in his ordination. On the contrary, it bears testimony to that grace and wisdom; for did men act as rational and accountable creatures, the shortness and uncertainty of life would constrain them to seek without delay an interest in the great salvation, now so fully and clearly unfolded in the Gospel,—and having found peace and rest to their own souls, their next concern would be the salvation of their fellow-men; so that whatever their hand might find to do, they would do it with their might, seeing that there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave, whither they are going.

XXXV.

MOSES AND THE ELDERS IN PRESENCE OF JEHOVAH.

EXODUS XXIV. 9-18.

In considering the remarkable transaction recorded in these verses, it is of importance, I think, to bear in mind that it occurred in the same place, and amid the same outward manifestations of the divine majesty and glory, in which the law had a short time before been promulgated from Mount Sinai. From the narrative, indeed, we are naturally led to infer that it took place on the day after that on which the law had been delivered, or, at the farthest, on the following day. At all events, there was no change, at the time it occurred, in those external appearances by which God gave intimation of his presence when he came down to deliver his law. "A cloud covered the mount, and the glory of the Lord abode upon Mount Sinai, . . . and the sight of the glory of the Lord was like devouring fire on the top of the mount in the eyes of the children of Israel." The thunderings and lightnings had perhaps ceased, and the terrible voice of God himself was no longer heard. But there was still enough, in the thick darkness and the devouring fire, to fill the minds of the people of Israel with fear and awe,—enough to have prevented any one from ascending or even approaching the mount without their having received, not only express permission, but special encouragement to do so. When we read, therefore, "Then went up Moses, and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel: and they saw the God

of Israel: ... and upon the nobles of the children of Israel he laid not his hand: also they saw God, and did eat and drink," we might infer that it was in consequence of an immediate revelation permitting or requiring them so to approach God. And we find accordingly that it was so; for we are told in the preceding context, that the Lord said unto Moses, "Come up unto the Lord, thou, and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel; and worship ye afar off."

But that such permission should have been granted, or such a command given to them, is itself a very remarkable fact; and the freedom of access to God, the nearness of approach to the divine presence, with which they were privileged, presents a striking contrast to the solemn injunctions which were laid upon them previously to the giving of the law, when they were forbidden on pain of death so much as to touch the mount. When the moment arrived at which the Lord descended on Mount Sinai, when the thick cloud rested upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet became exceeding loud, all the people that were in the camp trembled; Moses himself did exceedingly fear and quake. And when the law was given, when the ten commandments were spoken by the voice of God, the people removed, and stood afar off; "and they said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die." How different the scene presented to us in the passage before us! Not only do we find Moses, who was, throughout all the divine dealings with Israel, mediator between God and them; but Aaron also, Nadab, and Abihu, with seventy of the elders of Israel, as the representatives of the whole congregation, admitted to near and most intimate communion with God, and that within a few days after the law was given, and while the awful intimations of God's presence still rested upon Mount Sinai.

Such a contrast plainly intimates that we have here two distinct revelations of the divine character. If the people of Israel were unfit before and at the giving of the law to approach God, they were equally so, and must have felt themselves to be more so, after the law was given; for it must have been true of them, as it is true of mankind to the present hour, that by the law is the knowledge of sin,—by the law sinners are taught at what an

unapproachable distance they stand from the High and the Holy One. If they removed and stood at a distance while God spake the words of the law, nothing but a new revelation of the divine character could have emboldened them, or any of their number, to draw near to God after the law was revealed, inasmuch as the law carried with it only a sentence of condemnation. It is true, they might not perceive, as there is reason to fear vast multitudes of them did not perceive, the spirituality and rigour of the law, the exceeding breadth of the divine commandment; and in their ignorance they might have been ready enough to gratify their blind curiosity in drawing near to the place where God was, provided they thought that they could do so without running any hazard of being exposed for so doing either to death or to any other bodily harm. But God would neither have invited nor permitted them so to approach him unless he had purposed to reveal, as he did actually reveal, himself in a different character from that in which he first descended upon Mount Sinai; and it is on this ground, I think, that the passage before us is full of interest and instruction.

When God came down upon Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people of Israel, he appeared, as we have already had occasion to remark, only in the character of a Lawgiver, and consequently as a Judge who would assert the supremacy and vindicate the honour of his law; and if the people of Israel had had spiritual discernment to see the purity, and rigour, and extent of that law which was then delivered, they would have required no external manifestations of glory and grandeur to fill them with reverence and holy awe. Their consciences would have testified that the law carried with it a sentence of condemnation from which it was impossible for them to make their escape; and they would have felt that they stood exposed to danger of which even the thunderings and lightnings of Sinai were but mere types or outward representations. And I doubt not that some among them did so feel and judge. But the great mass of the people of Israel, as their future history demonstrates, had no such spiritual discernment of the holiness and rectitude of the law of God; and he was pleased, therefore, to convey to them impressions of his majesty and greatness as the Lawgiver, and of their utter unfitness to approach or stand before him, by a reve-

lation of his character that was palpable to their senses. They were constrained, even the most spiritually blind among them, to remove and stand at a distance, and were not only made to feel, but were compelled to acknowledge, that they could not bear God's presence,—that the great fire would consume them, —and that if they heard the voice of the Lord any more they should die.

But when God had thus shown them what they had to look for, if he dealt with them only as a Lawgiver and in terms of his law,—when he had taught them, as he still teaches us, how hopeless it is for sinners to gain access to God, or to find favour with him by the Covenant of Works,—he was pleased, without delay, to give new and still clearer intimations of the Covenant of Grace; for scarcely had the law been delivered in all its terror, repelling the people from his presence, and laying upon them the fear and dread of immediate destruction, than he proceeded, in his divine grace and condescension, to tell them, through Moses, that he might be approached,—that there was a way of access to him,—that though the law neither did nor could do any thing else than pronounce sentence of death on transgressors, yet an atonement was an admissible thing in his moral government, and they who betook themselves to this way of drawing near to God would assuredly find acceptance with him. And this was done in a manner fitted to convey to every humble and contrite spirit an overwhelming sense of the compassion and tenderness of God. The words which were first addressed to Moses, after God had spoken the ten commandments, were these, "Thus thou shalt say unto the children of Israel, Ye have seen that I have talked with you from heaven. Ye shall not make with me gods of silver, neither shall ye make unto you gods of gold. An altar of earth thou shalt make unto me, and shalt sacrifice thereon thy burnt-offerings and thy peace-offerings, thy sheep, and thine oxen: in all places where I record my name I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee." We can conceive a devout Israelite, who had been overwhelmed with the rigorous demands of the divine law, and with a sense of his own incapacity to fulfil its requirements, hearing these words from the lips of Moses; and we can conceive also with what admiration, and gladness, and enlargement of heart, he

would receive the marvellous intelligence, that the Lord of glory, from whose presence he had a little before retired in terror and dismay, was ready to accept of his humble offering, even from an altar of earth, and to convey to him a comforting sense of forgiveness,—the assurance of acceptance and favour with God. Formerly, God had been revealed as the righteous Lawgiver and Judge, in whose presence no flesh living could stand and be justified; now, he appears the Lord God merciful and gracious, forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin,—the just God, and yet the Saviour.

But this revelation of the divine character was still more fully unfolded in the transactions recorded in the chapter before us. When the Lord said to Moses, "Come up unto the Lord, thou, and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel," care was taken to show them on what ground it was that they were permitted to approach the place where God was; for Moses "rose up early in the morning, and builded an altar under the hill, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel. And he sent young men of the children of Israel, which offered burnt-offerings, and sacrificed peace-offerings of oxen unto the Lord. . . . And Moses took the blood, and sprinkled it on the people, and said, Behold the blood of the covenant, which the Lord hath made with you concerning all these words." It was on the strength of sacrifice, then, the type of the great Atonement, that the elders of Israel drew near unto God and were admitted into his presence. They were not, indeed, permitted to forget the majesty and greatness of Him who thus condescended to manifest himself to them, and who encouraged them to approach the place where there abode for a time the visible symbol of his glory; for though they did ascend the mount from which they had before been solemnly excluded, yet they were commanded to worship afar off,—Moses alone being permitted to come near the Lord, to go up into the mount, even into the midst of the cloud. Still, it was a very near approach to God, and a very distinguished privilege which they were permitted to enjoy when they went up with Moses; for we are told, "they saw the God of Israel: and there was under his feet as it were a paved work of a sapphire stone, and as it were the body of heaven in his clearness." What that glorious

sight was, we cannot pretend to say or even to conjecture. But while, on the one hand, it must be understood in a sense consistent with other express declarations of Scripture, where it is said that no man hath seen or can see God; yet, on the other, it plainly intimates that there was vouchsafed to them a very remarkable manifestation of the glorious presence of the God of Israel,—such a manifestation as could not have been granted, and such as they could not have endured, had it not been for the infinite efficacy of that Atonement which was prefigured in the sacrifice which was then offered. And this is very emphatically expressed when it is said, "Upon the nobles of the children of Israel he laid not his hand." Had he dealt with them as the holy and righteous Lawgiver dealing with sinful men, his hand must have been upon them for their destruction,—he must have been to them "a consuming fire." But he laid not his hand upon them. Not only did they live amidst the dazzling splendour of his glory, but they saw God, and did eat and drink. By the sacrifice which they had offered, God confirmed his covenant with them; and in eating and drinking before him, they received a pledge of his acceptance of their sacrifice,—a confirmation of the gracious promise, that in all places where he recorded his name, he would come unto them and would bless them.

And thus was the Gospel, even acceptance with God through the blood of atonement, proclaimed on the very confines of Sinai, and amidst the cloud from which the law had a short time before been promulgated in all its terror. God was then, indeed, revealed as the just God and the Saviour; and we cannot doubt that the record of this memorable transaction did, from that day forward, impart consolation and comfort to many an humble and contrite spirit. Few, it is to be feared, of that generation of the people of Israel had any clear spiritual discernment of the great truths which are here set forth,—and to none were they so fully unfolded as they now are by the manifestation of Christ,—the great antitype of Old Testament figures. But He who vouchsafed such a revelation of himself might give to his own people,—the lowly, teachable, and humble-minded,—an insight into the meaning of that revelation far beyond what we might conceive; for "the secret of the Lord is with them that fear him, and he will show them his covenant." Such, in

fact, is his manner of dealing with men still; for in how many instances have there been opened up to the humble and illiterate very profound views of the character and perfections of God and of the sublime truths of his Word, while to the great and the learned these subjects have been as foolishness! God has often hid these things from the wise and prudent, and has revealed them unto babes.

But to the Church now the subject before us is alike interesting and instructive. The simple transaction itself, as here recorded, may furnish abundant matter of devout meditation to every serious and thoughtful reader: for though we can but imperfectly conceive of the glory and grandeur which were unfolded to the sight of Moses and the nobles of Israel, yet we cannot, I think, peruse the narrative of what they saw without being impressed with reverence and awe, when we contemplate the almighty and eternal God condescending to make a manifestation of his immediate presence to sinful men like ourselves,—individuals of our fallen race; and doing so for the purpose of communicating what it did most nearly concern them, and what it does most nearly concern us, to know, and understand, and believe, as accountable and immortal creatures. That there ever should have been exhibited, in this sinful world, such a display both of the glory and the grace of God, is fitted to awaken still, in the mind of every man who fears the great and terrible name of the Lord, sentiments of admiration and adoring wonder; and it never will cease to be a marvellous thought to every reflecting Christian, that there is a spot on this earth's surface whereon the Lord from heaven descended in glory, and from which he gave forth his law, and unfolded also the riches of his grace. But as little can the subject fail to carry forward the thoughts of the devout reader to a still more marvellous display of the character and perfections of God,—even to the memorable time when a Divine Person appeared, not accompanied with outward demonstrations of majesty and greatness, filling the minds of men with terror and alarm, and constraining them to acknowledge the divine presence,—but in a state of lowly humiliation, wearing the form of humanity, partaker of our nature, God manifest in the flesh, in very deed dwelling with men on the earth. Though unaccompanied with those external intimations

of the divine presence which gave notice of the descent of the Lord on Mount Sinai, the appearance of Christ was unspeakably more glorious still, being that great moral manifestation of the divine character of which all previous manifestations were but mere types, and into which angels themselves desire to look.

And it is in Christ that we find revealed in all its fulness what we have already been contemplating in the solemn transaction recorded in the passage before us, even the great truth that God is the just God and the Saviour. If God revealed himself amidst the thunderings and lightnings of Sinai as the great Lawgiver, giving forth his law, asserting his sovereignty, and declaring his purpose as well as his power to vindicate the honour and to maintain the integrity of that law, he was revealed in the same character, and in unspeakably more terrific majesty, in the sufferings and death of Christ,—when there was laid upon him, not as a transgressor, but as the substitute and surety of transgressors, the guilt of those whom God had given him,—when the iniquities of them all were made to meet upon him,—when he was made a curse for them, that they might be redeemed from the curse of the law,—and when, by pouring out his soul an offering for sin, he magnified the law and made it honourable. Not all the terrors of Sinai, fearful and overwhelming as they were to Israel, could set forth the awful nature of God's holy displeasure against sin, as it was revealed in the sufferings and death of his only-begotten and well-beloved Son. Though he had come up into the midst of Israel, as he sometimes threatened to do, and had consumed them in a moment, this had been nothing more than letting his holy and righteous law take its course. But very different was the manifestation of his inexorable justice and unchangeable rectitude in requiring of Christ, who had voluntarily undertaken to be answerable for his people, that he should exhaust the penalty which they had incurred, and should satisfy to the very uttermost the demands of the law, before he could be "the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth."

And if God was thus revealed in Christ as the just God, and in a light unspeakably clearer and more terrible than amidst all the clouds, and thick darkness, and devouring fire of Sinai; so

he has in Christ also been revealed as the Saviour, with a fulness of grace and truth of which the transaction recorded in the passage we are considering was but a faint representation. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." On Sinai, Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, with seventy of the elders of Israel, were permitted, through the blood of sacrifice, to draw near unto God; but Christ by his own blood has opened up and consecrated a new and a living way of access unto God, by which all are invited to draw near, with the gracious assurance that they who do so shall in no wise be cast out. The elders of Israel were no doubt greatly encouraged, and were prepared for ministering encouragement to the humble and devout of the people of Israel, by what they witnessed of the grace and condescension of God on Mount Sinai; but on Mount Olivet the disciples received from Christ, at the moment that he ascended to glory, a commission to invite, and even to entreat sinners to be reconciled to God, and to assure them that a new and living way had been opened up and consecrated whereby they might approach him,—yea, even "come boldly unto the throne of grace," to "obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."

But it is not merely as an illustration of this great truth that the passage before us is interesting and instructive. In the admission of the elders of Israel to the presence of God at Sinai, and in the gracious reception which he vouchsafed to them there, we have an example of his manner of dealing with his people still. It is the purpose of his law now, as it has ever been, to convict sinners of guilt, and to convince them of their ruined and helpless condition,—that under this conviction they may be persuaded to take refuge under the shelter of the Redeemer's righteousness, the great Atonement, the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. And this will be found to be the ordinary course of his procedure in bringing sinners to himself. I do not say that there may not be some, nay, many, who have been sweetly constrained by a sense of redeeming love to close with Christ, and surrender themselves to him, before they had seen so much of the terrors of the law, or felt so much of the burden of guilt upon their conscience, as to be ready to cry out in an-

guish of spirit, "What shall I do to be saved?"—though, even in regard to such, they will every day make new discoveries of the holiness, and rectitude, and rigour of the divine law, if not to fill them with tormenting fears, to awaken their growing admiration and gratitude for the unsearchable riches of Christ, whereby they have made their escape from the wrath to come. But the divine procedure in regard to Israel is that which is usually followed towards sinners still. He reveals himself to their conscience by his Spirit, through the instrumentality of the Word, as the Lawgiver and the Judge,—he lays open to them the spirituality, and rigour, and exceeding breadth of his commandment, as extending to every thought, as well as to every word and action, as excluding every thing like compromise or indulgence, and as condemning, without mitigation or mercy, every transgression of every one of its requirements,—he sets before them in fearful array the sins of their heart and life, with many of their great and grievous aggravations; and their conscience, thus quickened and enlightened, forces upon them the conclusion that they are lost, and that without some other righteousness than their own they cannot be justified before God, nor hope to escape the punishment of sin. They may struggle long, perhaps, and desperately, against this conviction; and long after they have yielded to it, and have found peace, moreover, through a simple and lively faith in the blood of Christ, they may have reason to look back with humiliation and shame on the resistance which they made to the operation of the Spirit on their heart, and with profound astonishment on the forbearance and long-suffering patience of God, who endured all their folly and opposition, and ceased not to press upon them the rigorous demands of his law, till they were constrained to flee for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before them in the Gospel.

But when they are brought to this point, they are in the condition of Israel at Sinai, ready to say, "Let not God speak with us, lest we die." They feel that they cannot stand before him and be justified,—that they cannot abide his presence; and gladly would they remove and stand at a distance,—gladly would they take refuge anywhere, if anywhere they could find a refuge from the fears and forebodings of conscious guiltiness. But that is the very moment, as multitudes can testify, that God, who com-

manded the light to shine out of darkness, shines into their hearts, to give them the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. By the same Spirit opening their heart to receive the same truth, he reveals to them the finished work of the Saviour as a sure and solid ground of hope; and when they see and understand this,—when they are satisfied that they are welcome at the moment to come to Christ, without waiting for any attainment to make them more acceptable to him, —and when they are enabled unreservedly to surrender their soul's concerns into Christ's hand, willing to be saved and sanctified in his own way;—then their transition from a state of fear, and dread, and perplexing anxiety, to a state of hope and comfort, is just as real, and nearly as striking, were it outwardly exhibited, as that of the elders of Israel, when, from trembling at a distance, under an overwhelming sense of God's majesty and glory, they were permitted and encouraged to draw near to him, and receive tokens of his favour and loving-kindness. None but those who have experienced it can tell or even conceive of the relief and enlargement of heart which they feel, who, after a season of darkness and doubt, are enabled for the first time to see the infinite efficacy of Christ's blood in cleansing from all sin, and the unconditional freeness with which that blood is tendered to them, to wash away their guilt and to pacify their conscience.

The change which takes place in their views of the character of God is not less remarkable than that which the elders of Israel experienced, when they were admitted to see his glory, and to eat and drink before him. Till Christ was revealed to them as the end of the law for righteousness, they saw God only as a holy and righteous Lawgiver, an inexorable Judge, a consuming fire to the workers of iniquity; but in Christ they behold him as a gracious and compassionate Father, to whom they can at all times draw near, and make known all their wants by supplication and prayer. They are not favoured, as Israel were, with any external token of God's nearness to them, or any sensible pledge of his favour; but they enjoy what the scene described in the verses under consideration did but faintly represent. They feel that God is near them,—they see him with the eye of faith as their God and Father in Christ Jesus, pacified towards them notwithstanding all that they have done,—they

behold his gracious countenance turned towards them, as if it were "the body of heaven in his clearness." The elders of Israel were permitted to eat and drink in the presence of God, and while the effulgence of his glory shone around them. But still more intimate is the converse of believers with him now; for Christ has said, and he has recorded the gracious declaration, "Behold I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." The elders of Israel were permitted to tarry for a season near God; but believers now, if they live up to their privileges, may permanently enjoy intercourse with him; for Christ has said, "If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him."

Oh, how little do those persons know what they are losing, who are striving against convictions of sin, seeking to remain at a distance from God, willing to forget the subject which ought to be their main concern, and anxious to make their escape from Him who is convincing them of their danger, only that they may be persuaded to flee to the refuge which he has himself provided! I say nothing of the guilt of thus resisting the Spirit's influence, though that will be the subject of their unceasing sorrow and humiliation when they are brought to a better mind. But I would tell them of the peace and blessedness which they are deliberately putting away from them,—the happiness which they forfeit and lose every hour that they delay to come to Christ, and to accept of his gracious invitations. And to those who have in any measure or degree become partakers of everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, I would say, Ye know both the terrors and the mercies of the Lord, and ye cannot, therefore, be indifferent to the spiritual well-being of your fellow-men, nor be backward to embrace opportunities of being instrumental in bringing them to the knowledge of the truth, whereby they may be persuaded to cast in their lot with the people of God, that they too may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in Christ Jesus.

XXXVI.

THE COMMAND TO BUILD A SANCTUARY.

EXODUS XXV. 8.

"THE works of the Lord," says the Psalmist, "are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein." To this sentiment every devout mind will respond; for there is no department of the works of God, either in creation or providence, which will not furnish to such a mind abundant matter for pious and profitable meditation; awakening reverence, admiration, and gratitude, in proportion as these works unfold the power, and wisdom, and beneficence of God. It will be especially interesting and delightful to such a mind to dwell on that divine foreknowledge which extends to all the possible events of futurity, and that almighty power which controls and subordinates, to the accomplishment of a determinate purpose, all the secondary causes or agencies both in the natural and moral world,—to contemplate God as "declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient time the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure." The Scriptures abound with examples of such demonstrations of infinite knowledge, combined with almighty power, in the fulfilment of events at the distance of many ages after they were foretold,—and the fulfilment of which involved the employment of means the most varied, and the co-operation of agents that were altogether unconscious of contributing to the accomplishment of a divine purpose,—nay, of agents who, if they had known, would rather

have defeated than helped forward any such accomplishment.

But it must be more interesting still to the humble and devout reader of the Bible to find, that while these examples of the infinite facility with which divine wisdom arranges and divine power controls every combination of events, from the schemes of individuals to the revolutions of kingdoms, so as to render all occurrences subservient to the fulfilment of a definite purpose,—to find, I say, that while these examples of God's absolute supremacy open up views of his character on which the pious mind may dwell with growing admiration and delight, they have all a bearing, more or less directly, on one great event which does most nearly concern the salvation of every individual believer,—even the appearing of the promised Saviour, the revelation of the great mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh.

A very general acquaintance with the Old Testament Scriptures is sufficient to satisfy any one that the grand object of all the mighty revolutions, all the leading events recorded there, was to prepare the way for the coming of Christ, and to secure the fulfilment, to the very letter, of the almost innumerable, and, many of them, the most minute predictions concerning Christ. Every such prediction, indeed, necessarily required that He who authorised and enabled his servant to deliver it should possess the absolute control of all agents however numerous, and all events however distant; for otherwise he could not have secured the fulfilment of the prediction. It is this consideration that gives peculiar interest to the many minute prophecies concerning the time, and manner, and circumstances of Christ's appearing, as showing that all the intermediate events between the prediction and the fulfilment were arranged and overruled with a reference to that grand event.

And the remark is equally applicable to the express prophecies in which Christ was foretold, and the typical persons and institutions whereby he was prefigured,—both serving to show that Christ was the great subject of all the divine communications which from the beginning were vouchsafed to the children of men,—and that Christ's appearing in the fulness of time was the object to which the whole course of God's providence was de-

signed to direct their hopes and expectations. Many proofs and illustrations of this remark are to be found even in the portion of Scripture which precedes the passage now under consideration —enough to show that the first intimation of a Saviour, announced in the garden of Eden, was the great truth which it was the object of all future dispensations to unfold and explain; and it surely can never cease to be a delightful as well as a profitable exercise to devout readers to trace the gradual development of that glorious scheme, in which every believer in every age is equally interested.

The instruction delivered in the passage before us marks a very interesting and important period in this progressive disclosure of God's gracious purpose regarding the salvation of his Church: "Let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them." God had already vouchsafed to Israel many proofs of his faithfulness as the covenant-keeping God, and many clear pledges of his grace and favour. In terms of the promise made to Abraham, he did, at the appointed time, even on the self-same day, bring them out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage; in the exercise of his divine power, he removed the apparently insurmountable obstacles that stood in the way of their arrival at the land sworn unto their fathers; and, under the protection and guidance of a visible token of his own presence, he led them into the solitude of the wilderness, where he fed them with bread from heaven, and refreshed them with water out of the rock, that they might not only be taught their absolute dependence on him, but might feel their entire separation from all the other nations of the world, and might see in their outward condition and circumstances a palpable representation of the honour and privileges which were designed for them as the people whom God had chosen for himself. In looking back upon Egypt, the land from which they had come, they had nothing to recollect in regard to God's dealings with that people but the infliction of sore plagues,—the execution of righteous judgment; and in looking forward to Canaan, the land towards which they were journeying, they could anticipate nothing but similar manifestations of the divine displeasure against the impenitent inhabitants of that country; while, in both cases, it was plain, beyond all doubt or dispute, that the immediate object of

these judgments was the fulfilment to Israel of the promise made to their fathers,—their deliverance from bondage and oppression in the one country, and their establishment in the peaceful possession of an inheritance in the other.

They thus stood separated from the rest of the world; the divine power which had been, and was yet to be, manifested in the punishment of other nations, was every day exercised in a miraculous manner on their behalf, even for their very subsistence; and they had in their external condition a very plain and affecting illustration of the gracious words which God addressed to them on their coming into the wilderness of Sinai: "Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself. Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: and ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation." But gracious as all these communications were, there is something more marvellous still in the instruction delivered to Moses in the passage before us, wherein God announces his purpose of taking up his abode in the midst of Israel, and that his presence might be, in their apprehension, at once palpable and permanent, commands them to prepare for him a sanctuary or dwelling-place.

"Will God in very deed dwell with men on the earth?" was the exclamation of Solomon when he dedicated to the Lord the house which he had built to his name; for though it was an house "wonderful great," "exceeding magnifical, of fame and of glory throughout all countries;" yet when Solomon thought of the majesty and greatness of Him who was to take possession of it as the dwelling-place of his glory, he was forced to exclaim, in amazement at the divine condescension, "Behold the heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house I have builded?" And how much greater reason had Moses to stand astonished at the communication in the passage before us, "Speak unto the children of Israel that they make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them!" God's dwelling with men was not a new thing in the days of Solomon, for he had done so for many generations before. But it was a new thing in the time of Moses; for till the announcement in

the passage under consideration, no intimation had been given of such a purpose on the part of God, though manifold instances of his immediate presence had occurred.

And the time chosen for making this announcement was calculated to render it peculiarly impressive and striking. The law had been delivered a few days before, amidst such a display of the majesty and glory of God as repelled the people of Israel from the divine presence, and constrained them to stand at a distance and tremble; the cloud and thick darkness, from the midst of which God had spoken the words of the ten commandments, still covered the mount, while through it there shone the glory of the Lord like devouring fire; "Moses," at the express command of God, "went into the midst of the cloud, and gat him up into the mount;" and there he received instructions for the children of Israel to make a sanctuary in which God might abide,—a dwelling-place for the Lord of glory in the midst of them.

What could more emphatically intimate to the people of Israel that the ground on which God had already done so much, and had pledged himself to do still more, on their behalf, was not their having satisfied, or their engagement for the future to satisfy the demands of his law, but the covenant sworn to Abraham,—the promise that in him all the families of the earth should be blessed! When God appeared as the Lawgiver, Israel could not approach the place where in that character he displayed his glory; and when he condescended, therefore, to dwell among them, to take possession of a tent or tabernacle as his residence in the midst of them, accompanying them in their journey, guiding them in all their wanderings, providing for all their necessities, and giving access to them into his presence to ask his counsel and to receive his instructions on every emergency, the most spiritually blind among them could hardly fail to perceive that to the grace of God alone, as first revealed in Eden, and still more fully unfolded to Abraham, they were indebted for such high and holy privileges. We can hardly conceive how the most stupid and carnal among them could fail to ask why it was that the great and terrible God, at whose voice in delivering the law they had removed and stood at a distance, overwhelmed with terror, should condescend to come down and dwell in the

midst of them, giving them, through individuals appointed by himself, freedom of approach to his presence, and manifesting himself in a character fitted to awaken their confidence, and convey a feeling of safety and security under his protection and guidance.

Nor can we overlook another proof of the divine grace and condescension manifested towards Israel in this wonderful dispensation. Prone as they were to idolatry, even in its grosser and more revolting forms, they would soon have forgotten the solemn charge delivered by Moses, "Take ye therefore good heed unto yourselves, for ye saw no manner of similitude on the day that the Lord spake unto you in Horeb out of the midst of the fire: lest ye corrupt yourselves, and make you a graven image, the similitude of any figure." And we know that in point of fact they did very soon fall into this sin, so dishonouring to God; for ere Moses descended from the mount, and while yet the glory of the Lord rested thereon, they made them gods of gold, as they said, to go before them. How merciful, then, and how gracious was the restraint laid upon them to preserve them from this sin! For while care was taken that they should see no manner of similitude whereunto they might liken God, the marvellous fact that he had taken up his abode in the midst of them, by a visible symbol of his presence, was fitted, if any thing could do so, to awe them into reverence, to fill them with the holy fear of offending him, and to enforce the great fundamental commandment, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me."

But while there is a great deal in the passage before us to interest and instruct the devout reader, viewing it simply as a wonderful manifestation of the grace and condescension of God towards Israel, in accommodating his dealings with them to their condition and circumstances, the main design of what is here announced extended far beyond the accomplishment of any object of mere local or temporary interest. This we might infer from the circumstances and manner in which the announcement was made. Moses was called up into the mount, even into the very midst of the cloud where the Lord was; there he remained for forty days and forty nights communing with God, and receiving instructions respecting the structure of the sanctuary wherein the Lord was to dwell; these instructions extended

to the most minute particulars, both as to the erection and the use of every thing connected with it; there was exhibited to him a pattern both of the tabernacle itself, and of all the instruments that were to be employed therein; and he was once and again solemnly charged to look to it that he made all things after the pattern which was showed him in the mount.

It has been remarked, in reference to this subject, that while Moses described the creation of the world itself in a few verses, he has given and recorded a very lengthened and most minute account of the construction of the tabernacle in the wilderness; a circumstance which, I think, must have struck every careful reader, and which is sufficient of itself to suggest that a great deal more was meant by the accuracy thus enjoined than merely to teach Israel that nothing could be accepted in the worship of God which had not his sanction, or to render the tabernacle to their apprehension somewhat worthy of the majesty and glory of Him who was to dwell there. Both these ends were no doubt served by the strict injunctions given to Moses, both as to the structure and decorations of the tabernacle. But we are taught in the New Testament that the main purpose of the whole fabric, and of all the instruments or utensils thereunto belonging, was to represent the person and mediatorial work of the Lord Jesus Christ. The tabernacle generally is there declared to have been a type of the human nature of Christ, of which the apostle says that it was "the true tabernacle which the Lord pitched, and not man;" and the same truth is obviously assumed in many passages, where, in reference to Christ, allusion is made to the tabernacle or temple service. It was in the human nature of Christ that God did in very deed dwell with men on the earth, and in a fulness of glory which, though unseen to the carnal eye, was but dimly typified in the splendour of the tabernacle; and it is in his human nature that he carries on and will perfect that great work of Redemption, which it required so many and such various types to prefigure or shadow forth. All the privileges of which the people of Israel were made partakers, in virtue of the tabernacle, as God's dwelling-place in the midst of them, have been revealed in all their reality, and secured in all their fulness to the Church, by the manifestation of Christ in the flesh. As the tabernacle pre-

sented the only way of access into the divine presence, and contained within it all the means of offering acceptable worship unto God; so it is in and by Christ alone, the true tabernacle, that believers can approach God, and find acceptance with him for their persons and services.

I cannot attempt any enumeration of the various points on which the tabernacle, its furniture, and services, were designed to typify the human nature of Christ, and the work which in that nature he came to finish. The apostle, in his Epistle to the Hebrews, has handled the subject at great length,—and yet has intimated that he left many points untouched. It is enough for my present purpose to notice the general truth, that the tabernacle in the wilderness, and afterwards the temple at Jerusalem, were designed to foretell and prefigure the human nature of Christ, wherein dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily,—a truth on which the devout believer can never cease to dwell with growing admiration and delight, as showing him that the great event to which he is indebted for all his hopes and consolation occupied the chief place in all the revealed plans and purposes of Him who is wonderful in counsel and excellent in working. The believer may not be able to trace through the minute details of the type all its points of resemblance to the Antitype. But that very minuteness of detail will convey to him a very elevated idea of the glory of Him whom it was designed to prefigure, and of the place which the incarnation of the Son of God occupied in the divine counsels. The tabernacle, with all its decorations and glory, was still but a figure for the time then present,—a shadow of better things to come,—and was to disappear before the excelling glory of a greater and more perfect tabernacle. And yet, though but a figure, constructed of frail and perishable materials, it was formed after a pattern of divine skill exhibited to Moses in the mount, with a solemn injunction that this pattern should not be departed from,—as if to intimate that any admixture of mere human device would render it unworthy of typifying the true tabernacle which the Lord was to pitch, and not man.

And what a depth of meaning does this view of the subject give to the prophetic intimation concerning Christ, in reference to the removal of the tabernacle by his own appearance in the flesh,—"Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body

hast thou prepared me!" God did display his glory in the tabernacle of old; but it was revealed in all its effulgence when "the Word was made flesh, and dwelt," or pitched his tabernacle, "among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth;" and however marvellous might be the vision which was vouchsafed to Moses on Mount Sinai, unspeakably more glorious, to his pure and spiritual eye, must have been the revelation of Christ on the mount of transfiguration, when he was privileged to see the great Antitype of the pattern which had been showed to him; and when there was sent forth from the excellent glory to the favoured disciples a voice, saying, "This is my beloved Son, hear him."

But though the passage before us, in announcing the purpose of God to dwell among the children of Israel in a sanctuary fitted or prepared according to his own prescribed pattern, referred mainly to the manifestation of the Eternal Word in a body prepared for him, wherein, as in a tabernacle, God did in very deed dwell with men on the earth; yet his dwelling with men is not to be limited to the period during which Christ sojourned on earth and manifested forth his glory. From the beginning, the Eternal Word or Wisdom held converse with this world; for he rejoiced in the habitable parts of the earth, and his delights were with the sons of men; and as early as the time of Jacob, intimation was given, in the vision of the ladder which the patriarch saw, that a communication between heaven and earth was to be more fully laid open, which was never again broken off. To this our Lord referred as fulfilled in his person, when he said to Nathanael, "Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man;" and it is recorded, as a matter both of prophecy and history, that when Christ ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and received gifts for men, yea, even for the rebellious, that the Lord God might dwell among them.

Though it was to the incarnation of Christ, therefore, that the passage before us does more immediately refer, as that which was prefigured by the tabernacle; yet the effect of his manifestation is, that God has always dwelt, and ever will dwell, among men, even in his Church, to whom Christ has promised that by his

Spirit he will be with her always, even unto the end of the world. The Church, indeed, is represented as the tabernacle or dwelling-place of the Lord; for it is evidently of the Church at large, as well as of the place which God had chosen from among the tribes of Israel to put his name there, that he thus speaks: "The Lord hath chosen Zion; he hath desired it for his habitation. This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it. I will abundantly bless her provision: I will satisfy her poor with bread. I will also clothe her priests with salvation: and her saints shall shout aloud for joy." And again, "Look upon Zion, the city of our solemnities: thine eyes shall see Jerusalem a quiet habitation, a tabernacle that shall not be taken down; not one of the stakes thereof shall ever be removed, neither shall any of the cords thereof be broken. But there the glorious Lord will be unto us a place of broad rivers and streams."

These, and many similar promises, do plainly declare that God will ever have a dwelling-place among men; and hitherto it has been so, inasmuch as God has never wanted a Church, even in the most corrupt and degenerate times, in the midst of which he has given tokens of the presence of his Spirit, giving efficacy to his own ordinances for converting, sanctifying, and saving sinners. In particular branches of that Church,—in communities, or portions of communities, where professedly his Word is believed and his ordinances administered, and where there are all the external arrangements which constitute the visible Church of Christ,—there may for a season be few or no indications of the divine presence,—no marks of spiritual life,—no instances of spiritual resurrection from the death of sin to the life of holiness. If there be not a general departure from sound doctrine, which does sometimes take place, there may be a cold and formal acknowledgment of it, which is unaccompanied with any quickening or life-giving power; and the other ordinances of the Gospel, though gone about with external decency and decorum, may be as wells without water, affording no nourishment to the feeble, and no refreshment to the weary. Such examples of the dereliction of the Spirit of God, in regard to certain portions of the visible Church, may occur, and have often occurred,—but always, I may safely add, in consequence of such portions of the Church having first forsaken God, by giving way to a carnal and worldly spirit,

till the truth itself was so disguised, at least, if not openly perverted, as to become palatable to the taste of ungodly men,—till the ordinances of the Gospel, the privileges of true Christians, were thrown open to the profanation of all who might find it for their worldly interest to seek them,—and till the whole system which Christ has established for the order and right government of his house was rendered subservient to the worldly policy of the day, becoming a mere political tool in the hands of any one who had ambition and skill enough to employ it for working out his worldly ends.

But though such has been the melancholy condition of many portions of the visible Church in succession; nay, though the time has been when, to appearance, the whole professedly Christian world exhibited one outwardly gorgeous tabernacle, but within a ghastly sepulchre, because devoid of the enlightening and life-giving glory which should have dwelt there; yet there ever has been, and there ever will be, a true Church on the earth,—a tabernacle in which God has dwelt, and will continue to dwell among men. But the lamentable declension which has from time to time taken place in various portions of the Church reads a very solemn lesson to every Christian community. Such an example of the judgment of God, in withdrawing or withholding his Spirit from one Church or professing community, is as if he were addressing, not that Church or community only, but every other, in the language of the passage before us, "Let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them." He is as ready now to dwell by his Spirit in the midst of a Christian Church, to quicken them by his Word, and to refresh and invigorate them by all his ordinances, as he was of old to take up his abode among the people of Israel. But if the Church would expect his presence and blessing, she must be careful to improve her privileges,—in holding forth with all uncorruptness the doctrines of his Word,—maintaining the integrity of his ordinances,—and exercising in purity the discipline and government which he has established; and while she is thus faithful to Him, or if, after having been in a state of backsliding, she return to her fidelity and first love, then he will dwell in the midst of her, and he will vouchsafe proofs of his nearness and pledges of his favour, by sending her seasons of revival and refreshing from the presence of the Lord.

XXXVII.

INTERCESSION OF MOSES FOR ISRAEL.

EXODUS XXXII. 9-14.

We are told, in the preceding verses of this chapter, that "when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him."

Overcome by their solicitations, or, it may be, terrified by their turbulence, Aaron complied with this impious and daring request. He made a molten calf; and the people said, "These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt." Aaron, moreover, "built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation, and said, To-morrow is a feast unto the Lord. And they rose up early on the morrow, and offered burnt-offerings, and brought peace-offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play." Such was the state of things in the camp of Israel, when the Lord said to Moses, who had now been forty days and forty nights in the mount, "Go, get thee down; for thy people, which thou broughtest out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves: they have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them: they have made them a molten calf, and have worshipped it, and have sacrificed thereunto, and said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which have brought thee up out of the land of Egypt." This

announcement must have been very appalling to Moses, not merely on account of the intelligence which it conveyed, and which must have been as unexpected as it was painful, but from the language in which it was expressed. "Go, get thee down; for thy people, which thou broughtest out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves," seemed plainly to intimate that God no longer regarded them as his people,—that he was about to disown and cast them off. They are "thy people," said he, "which thou broughtest out of Egypt." And that the language was intended to be so understood, seemed to be confirmed by the solemn declaration which was immediately added, "I have seen this people, and, behold, it is a stiff-necked people: now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them: and I will make of thee a great nation."

The sin, indeed, with which Israel was chargeable, was the sin of rejecting God,—a sin the most heinous in its own nature, and in their case accompanied with circumstances of the deepest aggravation. It was not only a deliberate violation of an express commandment, "Ye shall not make with me gods of silver; neither shall ye make unto you gods of gold,"—a commandment to which they had solemnly vowed obedience; but it manifested a daring contempt of the authority of God, inasmuch as they set up their graven image even within sight of the glorious manifestation of the divine presence. Whether the pillar of cloud remained with them during the period of God's descent on Mount Sinai, or whether it was removed in the presence of the still brighter display of the divine glory, they were, nevertheless, in sight of such an intimation of God's majesty and greatness as had already filled them with dismay, so that they implored Moses to be their mediator with God, and as might have filled them with still greater terror at the thought of placing a graven image of their own forming in the room of that symbol of the divine presence, which had brought them up out of the land of bondage, and guided them in safety through the waters of the Red Sea, and the perils of a desolate wilderness,—and not only placing the idol there, but ascribing to that idol the mighty works which had been wrought by the outstretched hand of Jehovah, the Lord God of their fathers. "These," said

they, "be thy gods, O Israel, which have brought thee up out of the land of Egypt." And their lamentable infatuation is placed in a very striking light when we reflect, that the purpose for which Moses was called up into the mount, was to receive instructions to the people, according to their own request, how they should act generally; and, especially, that he might be taught how they were to make a sanctuary unto the Lord, that he might dwell among them;—and that, when Moses returned with these instructions, which had been conveyed to him, not in words only, but by a visible pattern, he found an abominable idol occupying the place where he had expected soon to see erected the tabernacle of God, the dwelling-place of the Lord of glory. The contrast must to Moses have been altogether overwhelming.

It has been supposed, indeed, that in setting up the golden calf, the people of Israel did not regard it as a god, nor intend by their sacrifices to pay to it divine honour,—that they looked upon it as a mere emblem of the divine presence, in which they might realise that presence more vividly, and that, through it, they meant to worship the Lord, the true God,—much in the same way as in later times images have been employed for the purpose, as it is alleged, of elevating the thoughts of the worshippers, and aiding them in forming more lively conceptions of the object of their worship. And in support of this opinion in the case of Israel, the words of the context are referred to, wherein it is said, that when Aaron had built an altar before the idol, he "made proclamation, and said, To-morrow is a feast to the Lord." All this may be very ingenious, though even if it were admitted, the employment of images in such a way, and for such a purpose, would still remain a very heinous sin, an abomination in the sight of God. But it is not necessary to enter on any argument for the purpose of establishing this truth. In the immediately preceding context, God himself, the Searcher of hearts, has declared, in the plainest and most explicit terms, the light in which he viewed the conduct of Israel, and the judgment which he passed upon it. "They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them: they have made them a molten calf, and have worshipped it, and have sacrificed thereunto, and said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which have brought thee up out of the land of Egypt." And

such being their sin, we may well stand amazed, not that God should have threatened to come up into the midst of them and consume them, but that he should ever have "repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people."

It will be readily admitted, I think, by all who profess to believe the Bible, that on the occasion referred to the people of Israel were chargeable with a most heinous and a very aggravated sin. But I suspect that, with many, the enormity of the offence will be regarded with less abhorrence, because of the absurdity which, in their estimation, characterised the conduct of Israel in regard to the golden calf. Indeed, I am not sure that there is not a tendency, in most minds, to look upon that conduct as so senseless, so childish, and so unreasonable, as to be altogether without a parallel, and as indicating, therefore, some peculiar stupidity on the part of that people, some incapacity for entertaining any elevated conceptions of the divine nature, which does not attach to any other people who have ever read or heard any thing of divine revelation,—and consequently, that infatuation like theirs never has been, and never can be exemplified where the Word of God is known. But there is a great deal of misapprehension in all this. It must never be forgotten that the seat of idolatry is in the heart; and that there it may exist in all its offensiveness in the sight of God, though it may never exhibit outwardly any very palpable or revolting form. In fact, its external manifestations will take their character from the prevailing opinions and sentiments of the day,—so that men of one generation may condemn, and even hold in contempt, the idolatrous practices of another, and yet themselves be all the while chargeable with idolatry.

In regard to Israel, they had been familiar with the sight if not with the practice of idolatrous rites in Egypt,—a country at that time the most enlightened and civilised, perhaps, in the world,—and in so far, therefore, as the folly of such practices was concerned, they were not more foolish than the wisest of the nations around them. It is true, they had been favoured with a divine revelation, exposing the guilt as well as the folly of idol worship; the authority of that revelation had been demonstrated by the most stupendous miracles, wherein the true God had vindicated his supremacy, in opposition to the false gods of

Egypt; those miracles, moreover, were wrought on behalf of Israel, and for the direct purpose of effecting their deliverance; —and thus every thing was done, not only to convince them that the God of their fathers alone was the living and the true God, but to secure for him the grateful homage of their hearts, and the willing obedience of their lives. In this respect they were favoured as no other nation had ever been; and, consequently, the guilt of their idolatry was aggravated beyond that of any other people. But they were not thereby proved to be more stupid than others. Their guilt, therefore, is not to be estimated by the particular form which their idolatry assumed, as if that form had been a proof of weakness rather than depravity. Their sin consisted mainly in their forgetting, and ceasing to be influenced by, what God had already done for them, and in doubting or distrusting the fulfilment of what he had promised still to do on their behalf. Whenever they gave way to this unbelief,—whenever they began to look to something else than the power and faithfulness of God, either for deliverance from evil, or for the attainment of good, their unbelief would, of course, manifest itself in their betaking themselves to those practices with which they had been familiar, and to which they had seen the rest of the world have recourse for the success of their schemes. These practices may appear to us now very irrational, indicating great darkness of understanding, as well as ungodliness of heart. But the sin consisted in denying the true God, —placing confidence in something else than in him,—and thus giving to another the glory which is due to God alone.

And is not this a very common sin, though it does not manifest itself in gross outward acts of idolatry? It is, in fact, the great sin of human nature,—the ungodliness of the human heart, —the alienation of the affections from what is pure, and spiritual, and heavenly. And this idolatry,—this resting in something else than God as a satisfying good,—this secret trusting to some worldly resources for relief in trouble, and for a full portion of enjoyment in time of health and prosperity, is perfectly compatible with an outward Christian profession. A man may be making gold his hope, and saying "to the fine gold, Thou art my confidence," though he would revolt from the idea of moulding it into an image, and falling down to worship before

it. He has never been accustomed to hear or think of God but as a spiritual and invisible being; and he has no temptation, therefore, to fall into idolatrous rites, but, on the contrary, every thing of an opposite tendency, in the general opinions, sentiments, and practices of the community around him; but if, with all this, he is in reality making his worldly possessions and enjoyments, be they what they may, his strength and confidence, while his observance of Christian ordinances, and his assent to Christian truth, are little more than a passive acquiescence in a form and system, of religion with which he has been familiar from his infancy; then what is there in his profession of Christianity that is more rational than the attachment of men to any other system under which they have been trained? He still retains in his heart the idol which it is the great object of the Gospel to dislodge, while, like Israel of old, he professedly acknowledges that God is supremely entitled to be enthroned in his affections, and to receive the homage of his confidence, love, and submission. Christ became incarnate, and suffered, and died, that when he rose again and ascended up on high, he might lead captivity captive, and receive gifts for men, "yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them," —not merely that he might establish in the world a pure and spiritual system of worship,—nor even make such a manifestation of the divine presence as God graciously designed for Israel, when he said, "Let them make me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them,"—but that men individually may be temples of the Holy Ghost,—"lively stones, . . . built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ." And until the heart be thus consecrated to God, and sanctified by the indwelling of his Spirit, men are idolaters in his sight,—giving to another the glory that is due to him alone.

The sin of Israel, then, though in their case peculiarly aggravated, and manifested in a very palpable form, is a sin which prevails to a far more lamentable extent than we might be disposed to conclude from merely contemplating its external manifestation, and the circumstances in which it was committed. Inapplicable, therefore, as their example may appear to others, it is full of very solemn and important instruction. I have

already adverted to the circumstances which contributed greatly to aggravate the sin of the people of Israel. But the exceeding guiltiness of that sin is set forth in the passage before us in darker colouring than in any estimate that we can form of it,—inasmuch as there we have the estimate of the great Lawgiver and Judge, declaring in what light it appeared to Him, and in what way it deserved to be dealt with. "I have seen this people, and, behold, it is a stiff-necked people: now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them: and I will make of thee a great nation." It was thus plainly declared, that though Israel, like the rest of mankind, were under a dispensation of mercy, and though, as the descendants of Abraham according to the flesh, they were heirs of special and oft-repeated promises, yet such was their sin, that they had not only forfeited their interest in these promises, but might justly have been cut off, even though by their destruction God might appear to have forgotten his covenant, and though the fulfilment of his promise must thereby have been long delayed. Nay more, it was plainly intimated that but for some interposition on the part of Moses, God would have visited them with his righteous judgment,—that He would have come up into the midst of them and consumed them;—not as if God was unwilling to be gracious, or needed any intercession to incline him to pardon, but that it might be recorded how Israel were spared in answer to the prayer of Moses, and not from God's thinking lightly of their sins; so as to teach them, and their posterity after them, and the Church of God in all ages, that it was of the Lord's mercies alone that they had not been consumed.

In fact, God gave a signal proof, a most marvellous manifestation of his grace, and divine condescension and mercy, in permitting Moses to intercede for Israel at all, or to offer up one petition on their behalf. But he not only permitted, he encouraged him to do so; for in no other light can we regard the extraordinary expression, "Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them." It was virtually declaring that if Moses were silent, judgment would go forth to execution,—that the sin which had been committed required to be marked with some special expression of the divine displeasure, for the vindication of the divine

rectitude,—that if mercy were extended, it must be in such a way as to leave no room for any one to suppose that the iniquity of Israel had been treated lightly,—and that the intercession of Moses was the channel through which that mercy was to be extended; so that then, and in all future times, it might clearly appear that the pardon of Israel was altogether of grace, and in no respect from any palliation of their offence.

And here we have one of the points on which Moses was set forth as a very eminent type of Him who is the one Mediator between God and man, and from whose blood, as the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, the intercession of Moses derived all its efficacy with God. By the sentence of the great and righteous Lawgiver, judgment had come upon all men to condemnation; and had there been no intercessor, the sentence must have been executed,—not because God was unwilling to be gracious, or needed intercession to incline him to pardon, but because he could not be just and at the same time the justifier of the ungodly. It was his willingness to be gracious that prompted him to find out an intercessor, just as he encouraged Moses to intercede for Israel,—one able and willing to save,—even his only-begotten and well-beloved Son, whom he did not spare, but gave up unto the death for us all. But for His mediation, the whole world had perished without hope, for the whole world were idolaters; and it is for his sake, and because of his mediatorial work, that all have been placed under a system of forbearance and mercy. Believers will readily and gratefully acknowledge, that to the intercession of this Mediator, at a time, too, perhaps, when they thought little of him, and felt little of their need of his interposition, they are indebted for the sparing mercy of God, whereby their day of grace was lengthened out, until, by the effectual operation of his Spirit, they were turned from idols to the living God, and in their blessed experience found in him their God and Father in Christ Jesus.

How little do the careless and unconcerned think to what they are indebted for the forbearance and long-suffering patience which they experience, while, day after day, and year after year, the Gospel is placed within their reach, and urged upon their attention, without awakening any deep interest in their souls, or weaning their affections from worldly objects of interest which

successively take possession of them, and beyond which they do not seriously expect, because in reality they do not desire, to find any enjoyment! They are little aware of the solemn truth, that they are as much the subjects of sparing mercy, exercised through the Redeemer's mediation, as Israel were on the occasion referred to in the passage before us; and that but for this mediation, whereby a respite is granted to them, the sentence would long ere this have been executed, My wrath is waxed hot against them, and I will consume them. They know not how often there has been but one step between them and death, when death would have been the extinction of every hope, the termination of every enjoyment; and they know not whether there may now be more than a step till their journey is at an end, till their day of grace closes in hopeless and unending darkness; for our Lord himself, the compassionate Redeemer, who, by his own blood, purchased eternal life for many, and a reprieve for all, has solemnly warned sinners that the long-suffering which has endured all their frivolity and folly may very speedily be exhausted. He spoke, and he commanded to be recorded, this most affecting and also most alarming parable: "A certain man had a fig-tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground? And he, answering, said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it; and if it bear fruit, well; and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down."

But while the passage under consideration thus opens up to us the great principle on which God is dealing with the children of men, even the ungodly and the impenitent, it affords also a most interesting and encouraging example of the honour which he puts on his own ordinance, the ordinance of prayer. At first sight it may, perhaps, appear as if it were chiefly an example, among many others, of the honour which God was pleased to put upon Moses personally, of whom it is said, in the next chapter of this book, and in reference to the very transaction which we are now considering, "The Lord spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend," and again, after record-

ing his death, "There arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face." No doubt, Moses was highly honoured on the occasion here referred to, as he was on many other occasions; inasmuch as by him God vindicated his own rectitude and truth, and, at the same time, magnified the riches of his grace and mercy. But still, it was as a praying believer, himself a pardoned sinner, that Moses was thus honoured; and to all pardoned sinners, to all praying believers in every age, God has manifested himself as the hearer of prayer, the God of all grace, and mercy, and consolation; and in reference to New Testament times, especially the latter times, when a spirit of grace and supplication shall be poured out in richer abundance, he has recorded this precious promise, "It shall come to pass that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear."

Innumerable, indeed, are the examples, and promises, and commandments whereby God has encouraged believers to pray; and in doing so he has, in a peculiar manner, manifested the riches of his grace and condescension. He has thereby placed all his people as it were on the same level, admitting the humblest as well as the most exalted into his own presence, there to unburden their souls, to pour out their hearts before him, to offer up their desires, and to make known their wants by supplication and prayer. Few of them, indeed, may occupy important and prominent places in his Church—and to none of them may it be granted to see in answer to their prayer, as Moses saw, any special revelation of the grace and goodness of God towards his people. But they have as free access to the throne of grace, for all things agreeable to the will of God, as Moses himself had; for what was he but, like themselves, a sinner, the object of the same sovereign grace and favour, the subject of the same redeeming power? And if he was exalted, as no other man ever was, and favoured with communications of divine grace which never were vouchsafed to any one else, it was for this, among other wise and gracious purposes, that believers in all future times might learn to estimate aright the value of the privilege of prayer.

To the ungodly and the prayerless, it may appear a very fanciful, as it is a very offensive thing, to speak of prayer being

answered, or of its occupying any place in the determination of events under the administration of Him to whom are known all his works from the beginning,—whose counsel "standeth for ever," "the thoughts of his heart to all generations." But while devout believers know from their own experience that prayer is answered, and can rest in the assured confidence that it will continue to be so, the passage under consideration does plainly teach, what is elsewhere also in Scripture taught or assumed, that the prayer of Moses was as much a part of the divine foreknowledge and counsel concerning Israel, as was his gracious purpose of remembering mercy in the midst of deserved wrath; and that if it was a certain thing that Israel were to be spared, it was equally certain that they would be spared in answer to the prophet's supplication. And all these views of the privilege and prevalence of prayer are amply confirmed by the many gracious admonitions addressed to believers both by our Lord himself and by his apostles. The Saviour condescended to teach his disciples how to pray. "He spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint;" and he expressly assured them that whatsoever they should ask in his name, believing, they should receive. And the apostle enjoins Christians to "pray without ceasing,"—"praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints,"—and, "be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God."

But while this passage, by example, illustrates and enforces what is every where and by every possible means taught in Scripture—namely, the inestimable value of the privilege of prayer in general—it is especially encouraging to believers as exemplifying the efficacy of prayer, when the object desired and sought for is the manifestation of God's glory, and the advancement of his cause in the world. Such was the one great object which occupied the soul of Moses; and it was the consciousness of this that, under the guidance of the Spirit of grace and supplication, filled his heart with boldness, and his mouth with arguments. It is hardly possible, I think, for any reflecting man to read without a feeling of awe, as well as admiration, the prayer which Moses offered up on the occasion before us, as well as on

a similar occasion at a future period of his history,—awe, on reflecting that a sinful man should venture so to address the Most High God; and admiration, that God should condescend to hear and answer such a prayer. His language expresses something like remonstrance, rather than humble supplication,—as if God had been about to do what would tarnish his glory, and give occasion to his enemies to blaspheme his name, and to allege that he was not able to do for his people what their gods did for them. To Moses, indeed, this must have appeared to be the inevitable consequence of the destruction of Israel, if God had carried his threat into execution; and not being able to perceive how such a consequence could be avoided, and being at the same time overwhelmed with dismay at the thought of the heathen having any plausible ground for alleging that the God of Israel was not the only living and true God, he gave utterance to his feelings with a simplicity and godly sincerity, which gave to his prayer the character rather of a remonstrance than a supplication. "Wherefore should the Egyptians speak, and say, For mischief did he bring them out, to slay them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth? . . . . Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, thy servants, to whom thou swarest by thine own self, and saidst unto them, I will multiply your seed as the stars of heaven; and all this land that I have spoken of will I give unto your seed, and they shall inherit it for ever."

Still more boldly did he urge his petition on a future occasion; when, because of their refusal to go up and take possession of Canaan after the report of the spies, God threatened to smite Israel with the pestilence, and to disinherit them, and to make of Moses a greater nation and mightier than they. "And Moses said unto the Lord, Then the Egyptians shall hear it, (for thou broughtest up this people in thy might from among them;) and they will tell it to the inhabitants of this land: for they have heard that thou Lord art among this people, that thou Lord art seen face to face, and that thy cloud standeth over them, and that thou goest before them, by day time in a pillar of a cloud, and in a pillar of fire by night. Now if thou shalt kill all this people as one man, then the nations which have heard the fame of thee will speak, saying, Because the Lord was not able to bring this people into the land which he sware unto them, therefore he hath slain them in the

wilderness. And now, I beseech thee, let the power of my Lord be great, according as thou hast spoken, saying, The Lord is longsuffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation. Pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people according unto the greatness of thy mercy, and as thou hast forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now." On both occasions, the prayer of Moses was granted. "The Lord said, I have pardoned, according to thy word;" and he has thus recorded, for the encouragement of his Church, the gracious assurance, that the prayer which is dictated by an honest and simple zeal for God's glory,—which pleads the fulfilment of his own promises,—and which is offered up in faith, will be heard and answered. Such was eminently the prayer of Moses. So little was he affected by the promise and the prospect of being himself the father of a great nation, the head of that family which God was to multiply and make greater than Israel, that, while yet in doubt whether God would so far depart from his purpose of judgment as to go up with his people to the land of Canaan, he prayed that his own lot should be the same as theirs,—that if they were not permitted to go into the land sworn to their fathers,—that if their names were blotted out of the book wherein they were recorded as the heirs of Canaan, his name also should in like manner be removed. "Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin—; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written." O, how powerful and how prevailing would be the prayers of the whole Church of Christ for the extension and establishment of his kingdom, were they offered in the same spirit and with the same singleness of desire for the glory of God! It would indeed be to give the Lord "no rest, till he establish, and till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth."

XXXVIII.

SECOND INTERCESSION.

EXODUS XXXII. 30–35.

When Moses besought the Lord that he would not execute his threatened judgment upon Israel because of their sin in making the golden calf, it is said that "the Lord repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people." It appears, however, that their sin was not to be passed over, without such a manifestation of God's righteous displeasure as might not only impress them with a sense of its enormity, but remind them of it by the experience of its bitter fruits; and it appears also that Moses was not made aware to what extent the visitation of judgment was to be carried. That the people were not to be instantly consumed, and their name blotted out from under heaven, seems to have been all that he was assured of, when he turned and went down from the mount. And, accordingly, no sooner did he reach the camp than he was made the instrument of announcing to the people what they had reason to expect as the punishment of their sin. He "went down," we are told, "from the mount, and the two tables of testimony were in his hand.... And it came to pass, as soon as he came nigh unto the camp, that he saw the calf, and the dancing, and Moses' anger waxed hot, and he cast the tables out of his hands, and brake them beneath the mount." When we bear in mind that these "tables were the work of God,"—that "the writing was the writing of God, graven upon the tables,"—and that they contained the words of

that covenant wherein God had taken Israel to be his people, and Israel had solemnly chosen the Lord as their God : we cannot doubt that it was under a higher and a holier impulse than mere human passion that Moses cast them out of his hands and brake them. It was to Israel a very solemn and emphatic intimation that they had broken God's covenant,—that by their guilty act they had dissolved the relation in which they stood to him as his people,—that they had forfeited all interest in the good things which he had promised,—and stood exposed to such judgment as to his rectitude might seem meet, in vindication of his insulted majesty and violated law.

Moses then proceeded to another act, which served at once to expose the folly and to warn them of the evil consequences of their sin. "He took the calf which they had made, and burnt it in the fire, and ground it to powder, and strawed it upon the water, and made the children of Israel drink of it." Whatever might be the process by which Moses was instructed to accomplish this, nothing could more expressively set forth the vanity of the idol before which they had worshipped,—its utter impotency either to do good or to do evil; while, at the same time, it did very plainly warn them, what indeed we find afterwards verified, that the very least which they could expect as the consequence of their sin, was that it would frequently be brought to their remembrance, embittering their comforts, and adding to the severity of their other chastisements. But it was not by such intimations as these only that Israel were to be convinced of the great guilt and the bitter consequence of their sin. They were to be taught, in a still more striking and severe, and to them, perhaps, a more intelligible manner, the melancholy truth, that they had broken their covenant relation to God,—that they had exchanged his service and protection, for the service and protection of an idol,—and that it was immediately to be put to trial whether that idol could deliver them in their hour of need. Moses had already poured contempt upon their god,—he had ground it to powder, and strewed it upon the water, and made them to drink it. But a severer trial still was to be made, whether these miserable and deluded votaries of idolatry would find, when they cried for help, whether there was any voice or any to answer, or any that regarded. "Moses stood in the gate of

the camp, and said, Who is on the Lord's side? let him come unto me." It was assuredly a bold proclamation to make in the camp of Israel, as we find the condition of that camp described in the preceding context. Aaron himself had been seduced or terrified into a participation of the abominable idolatry; and what ground then could Moses have to believe that there was another individual, unless Joshua himself, who had been in attendance upon Moses in the mount, who was not on the side of the idol? But he had already, under the inspiration and by the instruction of the Spirit of God, proceeded to demolish the object of idolatrous worship, without any care or thought about the opposition which he might meet with on the part of the people at large. And with equal faith, and, consequently, with equal fearlessness, he proceeded to execute God's righteous judgment on the guiltier and more forward of the idolaters, without any reckoning as to the resistance which he might experience, or the number of those who might support his judgment. He "stood in the gate of the camp, and said, Who is on the Lord's side? let him come unto me. And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him. And he said unto them, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Put every man his sword by his side, and go in and out from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbour. And the children of Levi did according to the word of Moses: and there fell of the people that day about three thousand men."

Thus were the children of Israel taught, in their bitter experience, the folly as well as the guilt of their sin, in exchanging the service and the protection of the true God, for the service and protection of an idol. Their sin was punished, and their idol could not help them. That punishment, indeed, was but very partial; but it was enough to convince them that, to whatever extent it had been carried, there would have been none to help or deliver them. And it is recorded as a warning to idolaters still,—to all who, in their various enterprises and pursuits, do really place their hope of success in the resources of their own wisdom and strength,—in the amount of their worldly means,—or in the extent and influence of their worldly connections, almost or altogether to the entire exclusion of any devout

recognition of God's sovereignty, or any humble reliance on his power and blessing. And if such persons have been baptized, have outwardly received the sign and seal of God's covenant, and have continued to bear the Christian name, the warning is still more directly and pointedly applicable, inasmuch as they are not only idolaters, in common with all men in their natural state, but they are idolaters, notwithstanding the solemn obligation under which their baptism has laid them, to choose God in Christ as their God, their portion, and their exceeding great reward, and to surrender themselves to his service and disposal, as his people. Such persons are here taught both what their idolatry deserves, and with what infinite facility God can assert, in their bitter experience, his absolute supremacy as the only true God, the almighty as well as the righteous Disposer of all events. And such is the design of every disappointment which they experience. So long as their day of grace is protracted, and their means of grace continued with them, their disappointments, though, no doubt, expressions of God's displeasure against sin, are appointed in mercy,—their tendency as well as their design being to convince men how little the idols, in which they are really trusting, can do for them in the time of need. But if such visitations of God's judgments fail to turn them to him, and to persuade them to seek, in his favour and service, their chief good, the severest of their sufferings will be but foretokens of the still more fearful calamity of being finally and for ever rejected by him. No punishment which they endure can in any degree atone for their guilt, or mitigate its penalty. If unimproved, it will assuredly aggravate both. Notwithstanding the severity with which God had commanded Moses to execute judgment on certain of the idolaters, the people were given to understand that their guilt remained as it was. That judgment was a befitting expression of God's displeasure; but it was no atonement for sin, and could afford no hope to the survivors that they should be otherwise dealt with. It only showed them that they, too, deserved to die; and accordingly we are told that "on the morrow, Moses said unto the people, Ye have sinned a great sin: and now I will go up unto the Lord; peradventure I shall make an atonement for your sin."

The people were thus left in doubt what the divine determi-

nation concerning them was to be; Moses himself being uncertain how far God's judgment on their sin was to be carried, or whether his intercession was to prevail for the remission of their sin. As the subsequent history shows, the intercession of Moses did prevail, though it was only after earnest and oft-repeated supplication that he received the assurance that the divine presence would go with them in their journey towards Canaan. And it was obviously in great mercy to Israel that they were left for a season in a state of anxious doubt whether their sin was to be forgiven. That sin was of too heinous and aggravated a nature to be treated lightly, as Israel would have been very ready to treat it, had they been at once delivered from the dread of its punishment. And, accordingly, Moses had been instructed to say to them, as we learn from the next chapter, "Ye are a stiff-necked people; I will come up into the midst of thee in a moment, and consume thee: therefore now put off thy ornaments from thee, that I may know what to do unto thee." And even when it was intimated to Moses, and by him to the people, that immediate vengeance was not to be taken on their sin, but that they were to be permitted to continue their journey towards Canaan, and that, too, under the guidance of an Angel, this intimation was accompanied with the solemn declaration, "I will not go up in the midst of thee; for thou art a stiff-necked people; lest I consume thee in the way." "And when the people heard these evil tidings, they mourned; and no man did put on him his ornaments." The whole history bears ample testimony that God was willing, and indeed had purposed to be gracious. But it was just because he was gracious that he left the people for a season under a depressing sense of guilt, and a painful apprehension of danger, that they might the better know the evil to which they were exposed, and the better appreciate the mercy that spared and pardoned them.

And so he deals with sinners still, as many can testify. When brought under convictions of guilt,—when made to see the demand which the law has upon them as transgressors,—when convinced that they have nothing to plead wherewith to meet this demand, so as to avert, or even to mitigate the punishment which the law awards,—and when they feel that they are absolutely in the power and at the disposal of God, as the offended

Lawgiver and Judge,—it may be, and often is with them, as much a subject of doubt and anxious inquiry as it was with Israel, whether their sin will or can be forgiven. It is true that the Gospel proclaims a free forgiveness even to the chief of sinners who will accept it; and there is enough, therefore, in the Gospel, at once to quiet the apprehensions of every one who believes and embraces it, as we find exemplified in the case of multitudes, recorded in the history of apostolic preaching. But from the natural proneness of men to self-righteousness on the one hand, and their aversion to holiness on the other, together with that darkness of the understanding which is the necessary effect of sin, they may long remain blind to the only way of escape from the fears and uncertainty by which they are distracted. And if, in the case of those who are ultimately brought out of this dark prison-house into the light and liberty of the Gospel, their eyes are not sooner opened to see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, it is not because God is unwilling to be gracious, but because this deep soul-exercise, wherein they are left to feel how unfit they are to satisfy the rigorous demands of the divine law, is needful to empty them of self,—to drive them from that self-righteousness in which they do so obstinately seek refuge,—to make them more sensible of the terrible evil from which they are at last delivered,—and to convince them that to grace alone they are indebted for their deliverance; for it is only in the heart so prepared, whether that preparation be longer or shorter, that the graces of the divine life will take root, and grow up to perfection.

Though Israel, as we have seen, were left in doubt and painful uncertainty whether their sin would be forgiven, yet they were not utterly bereft of hope. The same Moses, who had so unsparingly executed God's righteous though severe command, was equally forward to interpose on their behalf; and though they were distinctly told that the success of his interposition was but a peradventure, still even a peradventure was sufficient to preserve them from utter despair. "Ye have sinned a great sin," said Moses, "and now I will go up unto the Lord; peradventure I shall make an atonement for your sin." Accordingly he "returned unto the Lord, and said, Oh! this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold. Yet now,

if thou wilt forgive their sin—." He could say no more. He felt that he had no atonement to offer, no satisfaction to make for their sin, nothing to plead but what he had pleaded before,—the grace and mercy of God himself. He was silent, therefore, being satisfied that but for sovereign grace his cause was lost, and Israel must perish. Yet this was a prospect which he could not bear to contemplate, especially taken in connection with what had previously been said to him in regard to himself. If Israel were to be destroyed, however gradually and slowly, so that neither they nor any of their posterity were ever to inherit the land of Canaan, then Moses knew that he and his family were to be substituted in their room, and were to become a great nation, in whom God was to fulfil all the good things which he had spoken unto Abraham. But this prospect, which might have awakened the ambition and gratified the pride of some men, filled the mind of Moses only with sorrow and dismay. He could not bear the thought of seeing Israel perish; for with all their waywardness and folly, whereby they had embittered his life, he loved them still,—and loved them the more, it may be, because of all the anxiety which he had felt, and the toil which he had undergone, and the sacrifices which he had made on their behalf. But he could still less bear the thought of seeing them perish, because of the occasion which he foresaw it would give to the enemies of the Lord, the idolatrous nations of Egypt and Canaan, to blaspheme his name, and to deny his sovereignty as the only living and true God. Though he had nothing more, therefore, to plead on behalf of Israel, and on the supposition that their sin would not and could not be forgiven, the anguish of his spirit drew from him a prayer that he might not witness so terrible a calamity,—that he might not survive the destruction of his people,—that another name than his might be inserted in the book of the divine counsels, through whom God was to carry into effect the promises made to the fathers. "Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin— ; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written." It is not too much, I think, to say of this prayer, that it furnishes evidence of Moses' willingness to have laid down his life for Israel, if he could thereby have averted from them the threatened judgment. That, of course, was impossible. He could intercede, but he could not

atone for them,—as was plainly intimated by the answer which he received: "Whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book." Nor did Moses venture to propose any such thing. But we cannot doubt that he would rather have died than seen the utter destruction of Israel; and while, in the earnestness of his intercession, as well as in his willingness to bear with them the infliction of God's displeasure for the sin which they had committed, but in which he had not participated, he did eminently typify Christ, his very impotency as to making an atonement for them does, by contrast, exhibit in a more striking light the value and efficacy of the Redeemer's interposition. That no man can save himself, or "by any means redeem his brother," was never more clearly demonstrated than in the case before us; and, in fact, the truth was distinctly announced in the reply which Moses received, "Whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book."

But there is One "who is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them." And his intercession is founded, not on his willingness only to die on behalf or in the stead of those for whom he intercedes, but on his having actually died, suffering the just for the unjust, being made a curse for them, that he might redeem them from the curse of the law. In regard, therefore, to the success of His intercession, there is no peradventure,—no doubt or uncertainty. It is the testimony of God concerning him, that in him the Father is ever well pleased, and that he heareth him always; and it is his own testimony to all, that whosoever cometh unto him shall in no wise be cast out. If sinners, then, are in doubt whether their sins have been or will be forgiven, it is not because there is any uncertainty as to the power and prevalence of Christ's intercession, but from unbelief on their part,—an unwillingness to come, or a doubt whether they have come to him; and to remove this distrust or disinclination to come, he is addressing them in every form that is calculated to win their confidence and dispel their fears. In this respect, how different is their condition from that of Israel on the occasion before us! Moses could give them no assurance that their great sin would be forgiven; his making an atonement was but a peradventure; the prevalence of his intercession was doubt-

ful. Yet who can doubt that to Moses the heart of every terrified Israelite turned as its only hope,—and that all who had been convinced of their sin, and awakened to a sense of their danger, waited with trembling anxiety for his return from the mount, whither he had gone up to intercede with God for them. How miserably insensible must they be to their guilt and danger whose hearts have never once turned to Christ, as they can easily conceive the hearts of Israel turned to and rested on Moses! And, on the other hand, with what confidence,—a confidence unknown to Israel,—may not convicted sinners look to the Mediator who has made an atonement for the sins of the guiltiest who believe in him,—who is inviting them to come unto God by him,—and who is assuring such as do so come, that he is able to save them even to the uttermost, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them!

The intercession of Moses on behalf of Israel, as here recorded, which was his second intercession in regard to their great sin, was so far successful as to receive for answer a still farther relaxation of the sentence which had at first been pronounced. Already Moses had been given to understand that Israel were not to be instantly consumed, or, as he has elsewhere expressed it, were not to be killed as one man. But now it was further intimated that he was to proceed with them on their journey towards Canaan, and that, moreover, an Angel should go before them,—an intimation which, we cannot doubt, Moses would willingly interpret as implying that some at least of that generation were to reach the land of promise,—that he was not to be the person to whom the promises were to be transferred, to the utter rejection of all the rest of Israel,—and that, therefore, he was not to witness, what he so much dreaded, the heathen triumphing in the destruction of the people, as a proof that God was not able to bring them into the land which he had promised to their fathers. But while Moses thus experienced great relief and enlargement of heart, and was prepared, by his interview with God, to impart relief to his convicted and trembling brethren, yet the communication was so measured, if I may use the expression, in regard to the extent to which God's favour and countenance were again to be restored to them,—or, rather, it contained such a limitation of the forgiveness and favour promised,

as was sufficient still to fill the mind both of Moses and of Israel with sorrow and sadness. "And the Lord said unto Moses, Whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book. Therefore now go, lead the people unto the place of which I have spoken unto thee: behold, mine Angel shall go before thee: nevertheless in the day when I visit, I will visit their sin upon them."

There was thus left hanging over them a general and somewhat indefinite threatening, that they should from time to time experience some of the bitter consequences of their sin; while they were not told in what way, or to what extent, they were to be so visited. But such an ordination was alike befitting the divine rectitude, and salutary to the people of Israel themselves. It was due to the honour and majesty of the divine law, that the transgressors thereof should be made to feel that they deserved to suffer,—that, independently of all other considerations, sin merited punishment,—that this is an eternal principle in God's moral government of the world,—and that it is befitting his character as the Lawgiver and Judge to remind the subjects of his government of this truth by their bitter experience of it, if they will not remember it in any other way. But it was also a very gracious ordination towards the people of Israel themselves, —both towards those who were and towards those who were not convinced of their sin and duly humbled on account of it. We cannot doubt that there were many of both classes,—many who did, with unfeigned contrition, lament and truly repent them of their sin; and not a few also, perhaps a still greater number, whose convictions and feelings of regret were awakened only by the dread of punishment, the terrors of that displeasure under which they had seen three thousand of their guilty associates perish. With regard to the former, they would never complain of those chastisements whereby they were from time to time reminded of their great sin, and excited to celebrate anew the riches of that great grace and mercy which had forgiven them their sin. And in regard to the others, every new infliction of suffering by the hand of God, in which their former guilt was brought to their remembrance, was a new and a most solemn call to repentance,—and such a call as was especially fitted to reach the conscience, and convince them of the despe-

rate folly of waging so unnatural and so unequal a warfare as that of contending with God,—of maintaining a stout-hearted defiance of Him who was teaching them in their daily experience how easily he could crush their strength, disappoint their hopes, and convert their very enjoyments into sources of suffering and misery. It was in mercy, therefore, as well as in the way of righteous judgment, that God announced to Moses his purpose of keeping Israel in mind of their sin, by giving them to feel from time to time that he had not forgotten it, and by intimating also that in his sight they were especially guilty, inasmuch as it was by their solicitations or threats that Aaron had been drawn into a participation in their sin. "Nevertheless in the day when I visit, I will visit their sin upon them. And the Lord plagued the people, because they made the calf which Aaron made."

And such is still God's manner of dealing with sinners, both those who are yet impenitent, but whom he has not finally given over to a reprobate mind, and those who, "being justified by faith," have found peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ. In dealing with Israel, indeed, we have reason to believe that God carried his purposes into effect by immediate interpositions, and these of such a kind as could leave none in doubt why it was that they were so visited. But he needs not to have recourse to such methods of reminding sinners of their sin. He can accomplish his purpose in the ordinary course of his providence, and by means apparently the most natural. The solemn declaration, originally addressed to the children of Reuben and of Gad, is in reality applicable to all men, and will sooner or later be verified in the experience of every sinner,—"If ye will not do so, behold ye have sinned against the Lord: and be sure your sin will find you out." And it cannot be otherwise, under the righteous government of Him who is Lord of the conscience, —the principle which he has implanted as his own vicegerent in the human soul, and, in the case of the wicked, that terrible agent whereby he can bring down the high looks and tame the proud spirit of the most presumptuous sinner. And how often has he done so without any striking interposition, or any outward visitation of judgment whatever! In manifold instances, the sins of ungodly men have not only been unexpectedly brought to their

remembrance by the simple statement of divine truth, but so set in array before them, that they felt it impossible either to deny that the representation applied to them, or to treat it with indifference; nay, so vividly have they been made to see their character presented to them in the light of God's truth, that it has been difficult to persuade them that it was not designed on the part of him who presented it, though he were utterly unconscious of any such design, or even altogether ignorant of the very existence of the individuals to whom he was thus instrumental in bringing before them the state of their heart and the tenor of their life. And who can doubt that, even in the absence of the Word of God, events are continually occurring whereby sinners are reminded of their sins, and brought, for a season at least, under such convictions of guilt, and such uneasy apprehensions of danger, as do very sensibly affect or interfere with their worldly enjoyments? The ultimate effect may be very different in different individuals. In the case of some, such a recalling of their sins to remembrance may serve only to irritate, and to harden them in their guilty indifference; and in that of others, it may lead to their repentance and conversion to God. But the tendency as well as the design is obviously gracious in both cases. It is to warn and admonish sinners to seek the Lord while he may be found, and to call upon him while he is near.

But it is not with those only who are yet ungodly and impenitent that God thus deals. In the same way, and by the same means, believers also are constantly reminded of their former sins. It is hardly possible, indeed, for such persons seriously to read or attentively to hear the Word of God, without finding something that brings to their recollection some one or other of their former sins and shortcomings,—especially if they can remember the time when they were satisfied with a name to live while they were dead,—and when, therefore, notwithstanding their formal profession, they were without God, and without hope in the world. But at other times also, even in the ordinary intercourse of life, they will often be reminded, by apparently very incidental circumstances, of something in their heart or life on account of which they had reason to be humbled in the sight of God; and, on serious reflection, they cannot fail to see his hand in the arrangement of those circumstances which did thus bring

their sin to remembrance. The purpose, indeed, for which they are thus reminded of their delinquencies, is not to harass or torment them with doubts whether these sins have been forgiven. It is not in judgment that God thus visits their sins upon them. If they have fled to Christ, these, as well as other sins, have been forgiven. God has blotted out as a thick cloud their transgressions, and as a cloud their sins. But this is no reason why they should not be deeply humbled under the recollection of these sins, or why these sins should not be frequently brought to their recollection, just that they may be so humbled under them. It is a most salutary, I believe a most necessary discipline. The Scripture saints did not confine their confessions to the daily sins with which they were chargeable, and for which they still needed to ask forgiveness. "Remember not the sins of my youth," was the prayer of the Psalmist; and so will the saints now pray. It is by a deeper insight into the guiltiness of all that has been forgiven them, that they acquire larger conceptions of the grace and mercy to which they owe their forgiveness; and it is plainly intimated that so it will be for ever,—for never will the redeemed forget that they were guilty and defiled,—and that they had "washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

XXXIX.

GLORY OF JEHOVAH DISCLOSED TO MOSES.

EXODUS XXXIV. 6-8.

THE communication contained in these verses is a very remarkable one; and it was made in very peculiar circumstances. Moses himself, as well as the people of Israel, had been kept in suspense for some time as to the nature and extent of the punishment which was to be inflicted on the sin of making and worshipping the golden calf. At first, God threatened to come up into the midst of Israel, and consume them in a moment, and blot out their name from under heaven, and to make of Moses a nation greater and mightier than they were. The intercession of Moses prevailed in averting the immediate execution of this threatening; for the Lord repented him of the evil which he thought to do unto his people. Still, however, judgment to a certain extent was to be executed,—and even after it had been executed with great severity, the solemn declaration was made, "Nevertheless in the day when I visit, I will visit their sin upon them." It was, moreover, intimated to Israel, that though an Angel was to go before them in their way to Canaan, yet God himself would not go up in the midst of them, as he had done from Egypt till that time, lest, because of their perverseness and stiff-necked disobedience, he should consume them in the way. Alarmed at the prospect of being thus deserted by what constituted his strength and encouragement, Moses renewed his supplication, saying, "See, thou sayest unto me, Bring up this people:

and thou hast not let me know whom thou wilt send with me. Yet thou hast said, I know thee by name, and thou hast also found grace in my sight. Now, therefore, I pray thee, if I have found grace in thy sight, show me now thy way, that I may know thee, that I may find grace in thy sight: and consider that this nation is thy people." To this prayer he received the gracious answer, "My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest." Emboldened by his success, Moses proceeded still farther to request that the favour thus vouchsafed to himself might be shared in by the people also: "If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence. For wherein shall it be known here that I and thy people have found grace in thy sight? is it not in that thou goest with us? so shall we be separated, I and thy people, from all the people that are upon the face of the earth. And the Lord said unto Moses, I will do this thing also that thou has spoken: for thou hast found grace in my sight, and I know thee by name."

It might appear, perhaps, that now Moses had nothing more to ask for. He had received the gracious assurance that none of the great and overwhelming calamities which he dreaded were to overtake Israel. God had repented him of the evil which he thought to do unto his people, in cutting them off as one man, and substituting Moses and his family in their room. He had intimated his purpose that they should proceed on their way to Canaan, with the promise that an Angel should go before them to drive out the inhabitants of the land, that Israel might take possession and dwell there. In answer to the prayer of Moses, God had also so far departed from his threatened purpose of withdrawing his own immediate presence from Israel during the remainder of their journey, as to assure his servant that he would be with him and give him rest,—be ready to sustain, and strengthen, and encourage him in all his difficulties and trials. And finally, when Moses still farther entreated that the divine presence should be with the people in all the fulness in which they had already enjoyed it, this also was granted. A reconciliation, therefore, as complete as Moses could wish for, was thus declared to have taken place between God and his people: and though they might, in the way of salutary chastisement, be from time to time reminded of their sin, they were not to be visited with

rigorous retribution. Yet Moses was not fully satisfied. He felt as if he could not know enough of God. The more that he experienced of the divine grace and goodness, the more earnestly did he desire still larger communications of that grace, and a still clearer revelation of the character and perfections of God,—a desire which Moses felt in common with every true believer:—and, encouraged by the divine condescension in vouchsafing a gracious answer to all his former petitions, he ventured to say, "I beseech thee show me thy glory." To this he received for answer, "I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee;" and, accordingly, as the passage we are considering informs us, "the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth."

It appears, from the concluding verses of the preceding chapter, that the request which Moses preferred was not granted him in the sense in which he meant it, or in the way that he expected. When he besought the Lord to show him his glory, he obviously meant a manifestation of God's essential nature in some such visible form as he could look upon; for the Lord said, "Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live." It is, indeed, said elsewhere that the Lord "spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend." But it is plainly intimated that, by this statement, we are to understand that Moses received communications of the divine will as no other prophet ever received them,—that these communications were made to him, not in dreams or visions, or in any other of the ways in which God ordinarily made known his will to his servants, but in continued converse, similar to that which man holds with man,—and that this converse was accompanied with such manifestations of God's presence as had never been vouchsafed to any other. The statement does not mean that Moses ever saw, or could see, the face, or essential glory, of the divine nature. And, indeed, this is evident from the fact, that after the Lord had already spoken with Moses face to face, Moses still requested to see his glory, or his face, in such a sense as it was impossible for him or any other man to see it. Accordingly the Lord said, "I will make all my goodness to pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee."

But though, in regard to external manifestations, or such a display of the divine glory as might be visible to the eye of sense, the request of Moses was not, and could not be granted; yet it was granted in a far higher sense, and to a far greater extent, than we can conceive it possible either for Moses or for any of the Old Testament saints to have fully understood. When the Lord made all his goodness to pass before Moses, he did, at the same time, make a most glorious display of his character, by unfolding that marvellous scheme of Redemption whereby there has been made known, even to principalities and powers in heavenly places, the manifold wisdom of God. To Moses himself, with the limited revelation which he had of this scheme, it must have appeared a very wonderful thing, that the Lord, the jealous God, the righteous Lawgiver and Judge, when about to make such a manifestation of himself, as had never before been vouchsafed to any of the children of men, should have given such prominence to his grace and mercy, as if these constituted the glory of his character. Moses might naturally have supposed that the rectitude and justice of God would occupy the first place in the enumeration of his attributes,—especially in circumstances where it had been necessary, a short time before, to vindicate these perfections by the infliction of merited judgment. But the communication was very different. Moses was virtually assured that the Lord delighted in mercy, and that judgment was his strange work; and that, notwithstanding the many provocations of the people of Israel, whereby they had drawn down upon themselves expressions of God's holy displeasure, still his name and his memorial to all generations would be, "The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious." And Moses was at that very moment experiencing, in a very remarkable manner, the grace and mercy of God, his long-suffering and readiness to forgive. He was again in the mount with God, having carried with him thither, by divine command, two tables of stone, which he had hewed like unto the first, whereon the Lord was graciously pleased to write the words which were on the former which Moses brake,—thereby plainly declaring that he was not to cast off and disinherit Israel as he at one time threatened; but was to renew his covenant with them, taking them to be his people, and engaging to be their God. They were, indeed,

solemnly warned that he would by no means clear the guilty,—and that their iniquities would not only be visited upon themselves, but might entail suffering on their children for generations after them. Still, the glory of the divine character was declared to consist in this, that he is "The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin."

But the question naturally occurs:—On what ground or principle is it that God can forgive iniquity, and transgression, and sin, while, at the same time, he will by no means clear the guilty? That he might endure for a season, nay, even with much long-suffering, the transgressions of men, we might perhaps conceive as a possible thing, though even this we have no ground to reckon on under the government of Him who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity. And, indeed, we do see that God bears with much provocation and folly at the hands of the children of men. But to bear does not necessarily imply to forgive; and if, therefore, he does forgive iniquity, and transgression, and sin, does he not, in so doing, clear the guilty? The solution of this question is to be found in the Gospel,—in that scheme of Redemption which began to be revealed from the times of man's apostasy, but which was fully unfolded only when Christ appeared to take away sin by the sacrifice of himself. In that sacrifice God has given us the clearest and most awful demonstration of the truth, that he will by no means clear the guilty. If he could have cleared the guilty merely on the ground that he is gracious, and merciful, and long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, and willing to forgive iniquity, and transgression, and sin; then there had been no need of the humiliation, sufferings, and death of his only-begotten and well-beloved Son. But, with all his willingness to be merciful,—with all his long-suffering patience,—with all his kind and gracious propension towards poor, miserable, perishing sinners, he could not clear the guilty. It was a thing utterly inconsistent with the principles of eternal rectitude and truth. As the Lawgiver and Judge, he could not deal with the guilty as with the innocent. That had been a subversion of all law, and all truth, and all righteousness. The

most innocent of his intelligent creatures would have been at the mercy of the most lawless and disobedient, and the whole of his intelligent creation had been involved in irremediable confusion and misery.

On this plain and simple principle, it is obvious that no transgression of the divine law ever was, or ever can be forgiven, in the sense of being passed by, or overlooked, or exempted from punishment, merely on the ground that God pities sinners, and, as it were, cannot think to inflict upon them the penalty which they have incurred. To suppose that he could, is to suppose that he can cease to be the Lawgiver, and that he can give up his law to be violated and trodden under foot with impunity. God, therefore, cannot forgive sin in this sense,—that is, he cannot pass it by without visiting it with righteous retribution,—with such an infliction of punishment as is adequate to the full vindication of the honour of his law. God cannot by any means clear the guilty,—he cannot pardon or pass by sin. And if sin cannot be pardoned, how were sinners to be forgiven? God has no pleasure in the death of sinners,—he is willing to be gracious,—he delighteth in mercy. But he cannot deny himself. He cannot make the decisions of his law empty threats. He must be just, come of mercy what will. And still, then, the question recurs, how were sinners to be forgiven? And it is in the person, humiliation, sufferings, and death of Christ that we find an answer to this question. He came into the world for the purpose of bearing, in the room of sinners, the penalty which their sins deserved. The Lawgiver declares that such a mode of satisfying his law is admissible, and that he is willing to accept it. And that it is so, must be very plain, even to our apprehension, inasmuch as it required him to inflict on his only-begotten and well-beloved Son the penalty which was due to the transgressors of his law,—a fact which demonstrates, more clearly than the ruin of sinners themselves, the inexorable severity of the divine law. God, therefore, never has cleared, and never can clear the guilty: for Christ stood in the room of the guilty, to be dealt with as their substitute; and he was not cleared. The Lord made to meet on him the iniquity of us all. He suffered, though he was just, for the unjust. He bare their sins in his own body on the tree. He was wounded for their transgressions, and

bruised for their iniquities: the chastisement of their peace was laid upon him, and by his stripes they are healed. He became a curse for them, that he might redeem them from the curse of the law. Sin, then, has never been forgiven; though countless multitudes of sinners have. Their sins have been remitted to them, but they were not remitted to Him who stood in the place of sinners, and was made accountable for their transgressions. And thus in the cross of Christ we see a very clear explanation of what would otherwise be altogether inexplicable,—that God is the just God, and yet the Saviour,—that he has manifested, not only his mercy, but also his righteousness, in the remission of sins, showing that he is just even in justifying the ungodly,—that though he will not, and cannot clear the guilty, yet he is "merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin."

And here is the ground on which I before remarked, that the request of Moses, when he said to God, "I beseech thee, show me thy glory," though not granted in the sense in which Moses meant it, nor in the way that he expected, was nevertheless granted in a far higher sense, and to a far greater extent, than Moses could fully understand. For the passage, in fact, sets forth in very concise but comprehensive terms, the whole scheme of the Gospel,—expressing what, at first sight, may appear inexplicable, but what is most fully and clearly explained in the finished work of Christ, suffering and dying as if he had been guilty, that they who were really guilty might be treated as if they were righteous. And herein God has especially revealed his glory. The external glory which Moses sought to see, even if he had seen, and could have endured it, would after all have been but a transient glance; and he could have conveyed no adequate conception of it to others. But in the person and work of Christ, God has manifested forth his glory in a permanent form, on which all his holy intelligent creatures may look with eternal admiration, and in the contemplation of which they will continue to find new disclosures of his manifold wisdom. Of his justice and rectitude as the Lawgiver, they will see there a clearer and more terrible manifestation, than the mere infliction of punishment on transgressors themselves could afford.

The condemnation and punishment of sinful creatures was not a new thing in the moral government of God, for he "spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment;" and though this infliction of punishment must have been a terrible spectacle to those holy unfallen intelligences who witnessed it, still it was nothing more than what rational creatures must have regarded as the natural, the necessary consequence of sin, rendered unavoidable by the holiness and rectitude of the divine character. But to see the only-begotten and well-beloved Son of God, the Creator and the Heir of all things, suffering and dying in the room of his guilty and apostate creatures, in order to render their forgiveness consistent with the honour of the divine law and the rectitude of the divine government,—this was a sight which none could ever have conceived of or imagined possible, and was a tribute to the inexorable justice of God's law, which the utter ruin of a world of sinful creatures never could have rendered to it. Well might it be predicted of Christ in regard to this his mediatorial work, that he was to finish transgression, make an end of sin, make reconciliation for iniquity, and bring in an everlasting righteousness, and that he was not only to satisfy the divine law, but to magnify and make it honourable.

In like manner, God's holy intelligent creatures, both angels and the redeemed from among the children of men, will see in Christ such a glorious manifestation of divine love and mercy, as never has been and never can be exhibited in any thing else. All the works of God bear testimony to his beneficence; for even in our world, on which the curse still lies, the proofs of the divine goodness are innumerable, and every new discovery which men make of the nature and qualities of material things opens up a new discovery also of the marvellous skill with which they are formed and arranged, so as to be subservient to the use and comfort of sentient creatures. And with regard to holy and unfallen creatures, we cannot doubt that, in the pure and uninterrupted blessedness which they enjoy, they have manifold proofs of the love and goodness of God, of which we can form but a very inadequate conception. But whatever God has thus bestowed upon his creatures, in adapting their circumstances to

the constitution of their nature and to their capacities of enjoyment, there is nothing in all this to be compared with what he has bestowed on the sinful children of men,—even the gift of his own Son: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." And in like manner, with regard to the wisdom of God, that, too, has been manifested in the person and character of Christ as it never has been in any other of the ways and works of God, insomuch that we are told in Scripture that angels desire to look into it, and that principalities and powers discover therein what they would never otherwise have known,—even a bright display of the manifold wisdom of God. It were easy to show that every one attribute of the divine nature has been brought out to the view of God's intelligent creation, in the obedience, sufferings, and death of Christ, as it has not been, and could not be, either in his work of creation or his works of providence.

In Christ, therefore, God has granted to the Church the request which Moses preferred, and that with a fulness of meaning and to an extent which Moses himself could not fully comprehend,—even the manifestation of His glory. In making all his goodness to pass before his servant, he did in fact show him also his glory,—for he announced the two great, and, at first sight, irreconcilable truths, that he forgiveth iniquity, and transgression, and sin, and yet will by no means clear the guilty; and in this announcement he foretold the work of Him through whom God was one day to be more fully and clearly revealed as the just God, and yet the Saviour, and in whom he was to manifest forth his glory. It was only in thus revealing the blessed effects of the Redeemer's work that God could grant the request of Moses, inasmuch as Christ had not then come,—God manifest in the flesh. But he has since so come; and the request of Moses has been literally granted: for though when Christ appeared, he had, in the estimation of men, no form nor comeliness, neither any beauty that they should desire him,—though he was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief,—though men hid as it were their faces from him, and he was despised and they esteemed him not; yet he was the image of the invisible God,—God manifest in

the flesh,—unspeakably more glorious than any former manifestation of the divine presence which had been vouchsafed either to Moses or to any of the Old Testament saints,—the very brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person. We need not now to say, "Show me thy glory,"—for that glory has been fully displayed in the person of Christ. One of the disciples did indeed prefer a request similar to that of Moses, when he said to Christ, "Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us." But the answer which he received plainly intimated that the request was unnecessary; and that but for his ignorance and carnal conceptions, he would not have preferred it. "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father." The time was near at hand when Philip was to understand this; and all true believers understand it: for it is as true of all believers as it was of those who knew Christ after the flesh, that "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in their hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ."

The truth which we have now been considering is one of great practical power, wherever it is really believed. It goes directly to overthrow the vain and presumptuous hope, which men are so prone to place on what they call the mercy of God,—by which they mean that sort of mercy, or rather weakness, which is found to prevail among themselves, and by which they would willingly see the claims of justice set aside, rather than witness the sufferings of those who have justly incurred the penalty of the law. They forget that such mercy would often be the most cruel injustice, and that it can have no place, therefore, in the government of Him who has the order of the universe to uphold, and the honour of a perfectly righteous law to vindicate and maintain. God is indeed merciful,—very merciful. But his mercy is not exercised in passing by transgression on the ground of a weak compassion, which will not permit him to inflict the threatened penalty when it is incurred, or of an indiscriminate pity which will in every case, or at least in theirs, relax the rigour of his law. God has manifested mercy, infinite mercy, in finding a Saviour able and willing to endure to the uttermost what His law required for the expiation of the guilt of sinners.

But the very sufferings of that Saviour do most solemnly announce to all, that there is, and can be, in the divine government, nothing like pardon from mere pity or commiseration, and that they who have not closed with God's gracious proposals, in the way and on the terms of his own prescribing, must perish without hope. If they are united to Christ by a living faith, then they are one with him in the eye of the divine law,—the satisfaction which he has made to that law is placed to their account, —he was treated as guilty for their sakes, and for his sake they are treated as righteous,—and being thus justified freely through the redemption that is in Him, they have peace with God, and rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. But if their main hope is in some vague and ill-defined notion of God's mercy, then they are virtually denying the necessity of Christ's atoning sacrifice,—they are daring to think, in direct opposition to God's express declaration, that he may clear the guilty.

And if the truth before us be thus fitted to drive sinners from the false refuge in which they are so prone to take shelter, it will be found to be an equally powerful and persuasive truth to those who have betaken themselves to the true refuge, even to to lay hold on the hope set before them in the Gospel. If they believe that no sin ever has been, or ever can be, passed over unexpiated or unpunished, and if, at the same time, they have good ground to hope and believe that their sins have been remitted to them, then they must also be persuaded that every one of their sins was suffered for, and had its penalty exhausted in Christ; and if they seriously believe and habitually remember this, it is impossible but that they must feel anxious to avoid every thing that is sinful,—every thing which is offensive to God, and which can be forgiven to them only because it was charged upon Him who stood in their place, and was dealt with as guilty on their account. This is the grand motive by which sinners are actuated and constrained to forsake sin; and to such nothing can be more revolting than the thought of making light of sin, because they have a Saviour to whom they may betake themselves, whose blood cleanseth from all sin. Whatever men may know about Gospel truth, or whatever admiration they may profess to feel in contemplating the character of God as revealed in the scheme of man's redemption, they must be labouring

under some miserable and most dangerous delusion, if they are not anxiously seeking to avoid all sin, in every form, and in every degree; for if they really believe in the doctrine of Christ's atonement, his substitution in their room, his suffering and dying for their sakes, then they must believe that every sin which they commit formed part of that penalty which he endured when he bare their sins in his own body on the tree. They cannot regard Christ as suffering for sin generally. This were a very indefinite notion, and as cold and uninfluential as it is indefinite. They must feel that if he was wounded for their transgressions, and bruised for their iniquities which were laid upon him, then every one of these iniquities was so laid on him, and its penalty endured unto the uttermost. And with such a conviction, they must be anxious to guard against all sin,—to live, not to themselves, but to Him who loved them and gave himself for them, that he might redeem them from all iniquity, "and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works."

XL.

MOSES' WORSHIP.

EXODUS XXXIV. 8.

THERE is something remarkable in these words. They state concerning Moses what we do not read concerning him at other times and in other circumstances, when we might naturally expect to find it recorded that he was very deeply awed by a sense of the majesty and greatness of God. It was, doubtless, no uncommon thing for Moses to worship before God, as the passage before us represents him to have done, with every expression of outward reverence, as well as with every devout feeling of the heart. But the special notice which is here taken of his doing so seems to intimate that there was something in the occasion peculiarly fitted to awaken in his mind devout and reverential feelings. It is not only said that he worshipped, which we do not find expressly recorded on other, and these, too, very solemn occasions; but the fact is stated in a very emphatic manner. "And Moses made haste," we are told, "and bowed his head toward the earth, and worshipped."

We might naturally infer from this statement, that there had been made to Moses a revelation of the glory and grandeur of Jehovah more than usually solemn and overwhelming; and that, as compared with previous manifestations of the divine presence, he might have been disposed to say with Job, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee, wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

And what, then, was the peculiar vision or revelation of God which brought Moses into the attitude of such deep and reverential humility, as we find expressed in the passage we are considering? It was the passing before him of all the goodness of God. Moses, indeed, not aware of what he was asking, and little thinking how utterly unfit he was to abide such a display of the divine majesty, had besought God to show him His glory. But in great kindness and condescension, God had answered him, saying, "I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee,"—but "thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me and live." Accordingly, "the Lord descended in the cloud, . . . and passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, . . . unto the third and to the fourth generation." And it was on receiving this revelation that "Moses made haste, and bowed his head toward the earth, and worshipped."

And assuredly Moses had good reason thus to bow in lowly reverence in the presence of God, in whatever manner he vouchsafed to manifest himself to his servant. But, at first sight, we might be disposed to think that there were other occasions on which Moses might have been still more deeply awed by the revelation of the divine majesty, and when we might have expected that more would have been said of the humility and self-abasement with which he received these revelations. When the Lord first appeared to him in a burning bush in Horeb, and when Moses turned aside to see the great sight why the bush was not consumed, "God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, ... Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." But all that is said of Moses is, that he "hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God." And when the Lord descended upon Mount Sinai amidst thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud, and with the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud, Moses, we are told, spake and said, "I do exceedingly fear and quake." But when the Lord made all his goodness to pass

before him, proclaiming himself "The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, ... forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin," but who "will by no means clear the guilty;" the reverence and godly fear with which the heart of Moses was filled were still more clearly manifested and more emphatically expressed, though it may appear as if there were less on that occasion to awaken such feelings: for he "made haste, and bowed his head toward the earth, and worshipped."

We are forcibly reminded by this statement of another, and a somewhat similar case, I mean the case of Elijah, who, on the strength of a miraculous meal that had been provided for him, travelled forty days until he reached Horeb, the very mountain on which Moses stood on the occasion referred to in the passage under consideration. When he arrived there, the Lord said to him, "Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the Lord. And, behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake: and after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice. And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entering in of the cave."

The peculiar character of the manifestation of God's presence, thus vouchsafed to Elijah, was that it especially revealed the divine grace and condescension,—that it was of a kind the least calculated to awaken mere terror, or the overwhelming dread which a sinful creature might be expected to feel in the presence of a holy and righteous God, especially if that revelation were accompanied with any outward display of the divine majesty and glory. The presence of God was made known to him by a still small voice; yet he was filled with devout reverence and holy awe, and care is taken to tell us so; for when he "heard it," it is said, "he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entering in of the cave." And the remark is equally, perhaps still more obviously, applicable to the instance before us. The divine presence was intimated to Moses, not by an outward and visible display of the divine glory, as he had requested, but by a manifestation of all the goodness of God,—

a proclamation of his name as "The Lord God, merciful, and gracious." That this proclamation was made in a still small voice we cannot assert, because it is not said that it was. But the name so proclaimed exhibited the divine character in such a light as was fitted to awaken confidence rather than terror. It comprehended, indeed, a very clear and full statement of the Gospel,—a revelation of the character of God as the just God, and yet the Saviour,—forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin, and yet by no means clearing the guilty. But Moses was not the less impressed with reverence and godly fear, because the revelation vouchsafed to him was a revelation of grace and mercy, unaccompanied by any display of glory or majesty fitted only to awaken terror or slavish dread. And care is taken to bring this fact prominently into view, inasmuch as the feeling and conduct of Moses on the occasion is more fully and explicitly stated than we find in reference to other occasions equally solemn.

We have, then, in the conduct and demeanour of Moses, as here set forth, an example, a most intelligible and striking illustration of the effect which will never fail to be produced, on the soul of a sinful man, by right views of the character of God, as that character has been revealed in the Gospel,—meaning by the Gospel that economy of grace under which man was placed from the moment that the first promise was announced in the garden of Eden. Had the proclamation of God's name been merely, "I will by no means clear the guilty," it could have awakened in the mind of Moses no other feeling than that of terror, nay, of utter despair; for if the guilty were not, and could not be cleared, what was to become of Israel, or what was to become of Moses himself? Israel had been stiff-necked and rebellious even from the moment that Moses knew them; and a very short time, even a few days before, they had sinned a great sin,—they had violated the first commandment of God's law,—they had broken their covenant with him, and had forfeited all right and interest in the promises sworn unto their fathers. And even in regard to Moses himself, besides the sinfulness with which he was chargeable, in common with all his brethren and all the children of Adam, he had often manifested waywardness and distrust, and must have been conscious that if the guilty could not be cleared,

he too must perish without hope. On the other hand, if God had proclaimed himself only as "The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, ... forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin," such a proclamation would have exhibited a very partial view of the divine character, and must have gone to weaken, or even utterly to eradicate, that holy reverence which is due to him as the great Lawgiver,—a God of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works. Either of these views of the divine character, if really entertained alone, though directly opposite to each other, would prove ruinous to the soul,—leading to utter despair on the one hand, and to carnal self-security and daring presumption on the other.

But in all his dealings with men, God has manifested special care in so revealing his character as to leave them without excuse if they should either despair of his mercy on the one hand, or presumptuously rely upon that mercy on the other, so as to flatter themselves that he will forgive their iniquity, and transgression, and sin, in a way inconsistent with the strictest demands of his eternal justice. And Moses, notwithstanding the comparative obscurity of the revelation of the Gospel which he had, understood the divine character well; for while none ever ventured to address God with greater confidence and boldness than he did, none, at the same time, ever entertained sentiments of more profound veneration for the purity and rectitude of God than he felt. And I need go no farther than the passage we are considering, and the occasion of what is there stated, as recorded in the preceding verses, in proof of the remark; for while he was bold enough to say, "I beseech thee, show me thy glory," yet when the Lord showed him all his goodness, and proclaimed himself merciful and gracious, his boldness seemed rather to forsake him than to gather strength. He "made haste, and bowed his head toward the earth, and worshipped."

With the full and clear revelation of the Gospel which we now enjoy, there ought to be nothing dark or hard to be understood in the state of mind in which the passage under consideration represents Moses to have been, when the Lord made all his goodness to pass before him. Those who have read or thought so much about the Gospel, as to have any clear apprehension of

the principles which it lays down, and the truths which it asserts, considered merely as subjects of speculation, must perceive that the view which it presents of the divine character is fitted to generate the very feelings and frame of mind which Moses manifested. Even though such persons are themselves practically ignorant of such feelings, if they but suppose the Gospel to be true, and to be seriously entertained as a matter that does most nearly concern men's happiness and hopes for time and for eternity, they must see that it is equally fitted to rescue the perplexed and troubled soul from despair on the one hand, and to prevent it from seeking safety in a refuge of lies on the other, by resting in carnal security on some vague, unholy, and dishonourable notion of the general mercy of God. Men may see all this, even though they have never felt any deeper interest in the Gospel than making it a subject of speculation; and, I fear, there are men possessed of head-knowledge enough to perceive, and to talk about the Gospel, and about the revelation of the divine character which it affords, as a very beautiful system, while their hearts remained unaffected by its sublime truths, and their lives uninfluenced by its holy precepts.

But simple as the scheme of the Gospel is, considered merely as a subject addressed to the understanding, and obviously as it is fitted to generate the frame of spirit which Moses manifested on the occasion before us, it will be found that, practically, it produces in too many cases no such effect. Even of those who are awakened from that state of dreamy indifference about their souls' concerns, in which such vast multitudes are disposed contentedly to remain, there are not a few who for a season can find nothing in the Gospel to comfort or encourage them. Though it be the leading feature, nay, the very essence of the Gospel as good news to the guilty, that it reveals God as "The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, ... forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin;" yet while newly awakened,—awakened, it may be, from a long course of formality and indifference,—and while their conscience continues to write very bitter things against them, they can see nothing in the divine character but the inexorable justice of a righteous Lawgiver and Judge, who will by no means clear the guilty. Not only are they disposed to dwell exclusively on

the number and aggravated nature of their sins, and on the righteous judgment which God has denounced against sinners, but they will be ready to resist any attempt to bring before them the gracious plan whereby this denunciation of the divine displeasure against sin may be reconciled, and made perfectly consistent with the free remission of all their sins. They may admit it as a general truth, that there is mercy with God; but they will be ingenious in finding out arguments whereby to show that this truth cannot avail them,—that there is something peculiar in their case which excludes them from any participation in the pardon which is freely proclaimed to others,—and that they can never, therefore, experience the consolation and good hope which the Scriptures represent as the portion of those "whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered," and "to whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity."

Now, regarding such individuals, I would observe in passing, that though they require to be dealt with in the way of great tenderness by any one who would seek to remove their misapprehension, and though I would willingly so deal with them, yet it were to act unfaithfully by them not to warn them that there is self-righteousness at the foundation of their despondency. They may be startled, perhaps, by this statement. They may say, Depressed as we are by an overwhelming sense of guilt, so depressed and humbled as to be bereft of all hope of forgiveness, how can it be said that we are self-righteous, or that we are seeking or expecting to find mercy with God on the ground of our own righteousness, when the cause of all our fear and despondency is just the consciousness that we are utterly destitute of all righteousness? Be it so: but it is still true that there is self-righteousness at the foundation of their despondency. For why is it that they think their case peculiar, so different from the case of other sinful men, that what is sufficient to minister hope and consolation to others holds out no hope or consolation to them? It must be because they are so much guiltier than others. There is no other reason which they can assign for it,—and indeed it will be found that they readily assign this as the reason why they cannot find rest in the Gospel as others may find it. And what is this but saying that if their guilt were somewhat less than it is,—if they had not sinned so long and so

grievously,—if their sinfulness had been more like the sinfulness of ordinary men, without any peculiar aggravation,—then their condition would have been less desperate,—then they might, like others, have entertained some hope of finding mercy with God, and have looked to the Gospel for consolation and relief? And what is all this but virtually saying, that but for certain peculiar aggravations in their case, they might have had self-righteousness enough to have been the foundation of some hope towards God? I would entreat all such to reflect that they are not only misapprehending the nature of the Gospel, but that they are in reality excluding altogether the only foundation of hope towards God which it sets forth, and are surrendering themselves to despondency because they are not able in themselves to meet and to satisfy the demands of the divine law.

But though such examples, as I have now adverted to, of the effects of partial views of the divine character, are by no means rare, there is, I fear, another class, incalculably larger, in which the effect of partial views of that character, though of a very different kind, is very clearly exhibited, and with very melancholy results. I refer to those, of whom I fear there are vast multitudes, who have gathered little or nothing more from the Gospel than some vague idea that God is merciful; and resting contented with this, their hopes and prospects for eternity have seldom or never been the subject of very anxious inquiry. The common form, I believe, which this misapprehension assumes, when there is any thing distinct in the idea of God's mercy at all, is, that when men have done what they can, or what they may reasonably be expected to do, the merits of Christ will be available for supplying their defects, or rather God will in mercy deal leniently by their offences, and so all will be well. In many instances, I believe, there is no distinct conception at all of the ground on which God is merciful, or of the manner in which he exercises his mercy. Multitudes, it is to be feared, rest satisfied with a very loose and ill-defined notion that such is his character, and, therefore, that their condition can never be one of any great peril. But even when there has been some inquiry into the ground on which God will show mercy, from a feeling that something more certain on the subject is necessary, it will be found that the view entertained is, in substance, what

has been stated,—namely, that having done their part, the mercy of God in Christ will do the rest. And thus self-righteousness constitutes in reality the ground of their hope, as in the case of the former it lay at the foundation of their despondency, and in both cases the work of Christ, as a perfect satisfaction to the divine law, is virtually excluded.

I might farther observe, in regard to this partial, or rather most false and dishonouring view of the divine character, that they who adopt it, if they think seriously at all, must remain through life, and be at the moment of death, in a state of the most painful and perplexing uncertainty, inasmuch as it must ever be a question with them whether their efforts and their doings, in the way of satisfying God's law, have been such as that, through the mercy of God, they can be accepted. On their principle, and according to their views, this question never can be resolved or settled anywhere but at the judgment-seat; for disguise it as they may, their hope of acquittal depends on a balancing between their sins and their virtues,—on the question whether they have yielded a reasonable amount of obedience to the divine law, so as that they may hope for mercy,—that is, so as that they may be entitled to participate in the gracious allowance which, as they suppose, God will make for the weakness of human nature, and the imperfections of human obedience. They never can, therefore, arrive at any thing like a sure and solid hope of reconciliation with God. And if so, then they can never yield any obedience, or perform any one act of submission to the divine will upon the only principle that can render such an act true and acceptable obedience in the sight of God,—namely, love, that love which can only exist in connection with confidence towards God, and filial reliance on his grace and mercy as a forgiving Father. If, therefore, they think seriously at all, they must feel that they cannot reckon with any assured confidence on the mercy of God,—that very mercy which they would fain believe is so large and so indiscriminate as that scarcely any one can fail of participating in it; and with this doubt, this want of any thing like good hope, they can regard God only with such a secret suspicion as renders him, in their estimation, stern and severe,—a being with whom they would willingly hold as little as possible of any thing like close and personal intercourse.

But, I fear, multitudes never think seriously at all, and are not conscious, therefore, of any such suspicious and distrustful thoughts towards God as I have now been speaking of. They contrive to avoid any thing like a painful conflict with convictions of sin, by taking shelter in their vague notion of God's mercy. They have never looked at God as the righteous Lawgiver and Judge, and are utter strangers to the emotions which such a view of his character never can fail to awaken in the sinful soul that seriously entertains it. In fact, they can have no real reverence or godly fear in regard to the divine character. Their notion of his mercy is so lax and so accommodating, that they can reduce the demands of his law to any standard, however low, which they find to be convenient. Their ultimate standard, in fact, comes to be just what they think reasonable to be expected of them, in their circumstances, in the way of self-denial and obedience; and the tendency of this principle must be to sink that standard still lower. Indeed, there is no limit beneath which they might not fall in coldness, formality, and even gross violation of the divine law, on the plea that in their condition, and with their temptations, it could not be reasonably expected that they should be more detached from the world, and more devoted to spiritual and divine things, were it not that their downward course is checked and arrested by the general opinion of the community around them; so that the opinion of the world becomes at last the rule of their conduct. But in all that they may do in the way of obedience, and in all that they may observe in the way of complying with the instituted forms of worship, there can be no real, heartfelt reverence for God,—no such godly fear as Moses felt and expressed, when he "made haste, and bowed his head toward the earth, and worshipped."

Such, it will be found, are and must ever be the effects of partial and erroneous views of the divine character. The revelation of the grace and mercy of God, as forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin, so far from weakening, in the mind of Moses, his feelings of reverential fear, served but to strengthen these feelings, filling his soul with holy awe, and bringing him into the attitude of deep humility and adoring wonder. And such will be the effect of right views of God's character in every instance where men really feel that they have personally to

transact with God, as at once the just God and the Saviour, and that there can be no hope or peace for them till they have so transacted, and till they have settled, on sure and solid ground, what is infinitely the most momentous concern with them,—namely, the pardon of their sins, and their reconciliation with God. And when that question is settled, so far from diminishing their reverence for God as the High and the Holy One, they will feel that they had never before known what true reverence and godly fear was. The Psalmist expresses this truth alike beautifully and emphatically when he says, addressing God, "If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee that thou mayest be feared." To many, I daresay, this would appear a very strange saying, if we could only get them seriously to entertain and think about it: "There is forgiveness with thee that thou mayest be feared." If the Psalmist had said, "There is holiness with thee to hate sin, and justice with thee to punish it, that thou mayest be feared," I doubt not multitudes would think his statement more intelligible and more obvious.

But neither of the classes of persons to whom I have been referring will be able to see any meaning in the declaration that the Psalmist feared the Lord, because there was forgiveness with him. With regard to those who have given way to despondency, on the ground that there is no hope of forgiveness for them, they will be ready to say, that if they did obtain forgiveness, their fear would be dispelled, and that the removal of their fear is the very relief which, above all things, they desire. But they are not aware that their fear is not a godly fear,—not that filial and affectionate reverence which children would entertain for a father whom they love supremely, in whom they can confide unreservedly, and who in their estimation possesses every excellence and perfection which can render his character lovely, and worthy of their highest moral esteem. Did they but see that there is forgiveness with him for them, they would indeed be delivered from their present slavish dread, which is more nearly allied to hatred than to love. But they would feel that a sense of this forgiveness had awakened in their mind such an homage of reverence, and godly fear, and holy awe, as they had never paid to him, even in the depth of their greatest

despondency and depression. And with regard to the other class,—those who have escaped the spiritual conflict which multitudes pass through before they find rest, by taking refuge in a general notion of God's mercy,—they cannot understand how the fact that there is forgiveness with God should be a reason why he is to be feared. They have never had any fear of God in almost any sense of that word,—not even the dread or terror of his glorious majesty and inflexible justice, by which others have for a time been oppressed. They believe, though upon very false principles, that there is forgiveness with God, and it is this very consideration that has preserved them from those fears and misgivings which would otherwise have disturbed them. Of a holy, reverential, and child-like fear of offending God, they have no conception; and the declaration of the Psalmist, therefore, must be altogether unintelligible when he says, "There is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared."

But it is a most intelligible and comprehensive declaration to all who have known the grace of God in truth,—who have undergone the conflict with the fears and misgivings of a guilty mind, which so many pass through before they find rest,—and who have at last found that rest in a simple and unreserved reliance on Christ as the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth. They are conscious, and they will be ready to acknowledge, that while they were maintaining the painful, the all but desperate struggle with their convictions and their fears,—and while, as they then thought, they were deeply humbled and abased before God, they were in reality strangers to true humility and godly fear,—that their prayers were extorted from them by the mere pressure of apprehended danger,—and that, with all their confessions of sin, and self-condemnation, and earnest desires for mercy, they had no right apprehension of their sin as committed against God, and no true contrition for the dishonour which they had done to him and to his holy law. But when they saw that a free pardon, through the blood of his Son, was placed at their acceptance, and that they were as welcome as any other sinner of mankind to avail themselves of it, this blessed truth did not only bring peace to their troubled mind, but awaken such feelings of reverence and godly fear, to which till then they had been utter strangers. Till then, they

had never really worshipped God in spirit and in truth. He had, indeed, been revealed to their conscience in terrible majesty, when they contemplated him as a sin-avenging God, of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, and by no means clearing the guilty. But never did they behold him more glorious in holiness, more fearful in praises, or more truly doing wonders, than when first he was revealed to their faith as exercising forgiveness, as freely pardoning their iniquity, transgression, and sin. It is in forgiveness that God declares to his intelligent creatures the infinite moral worth of the atoning sacrifice of his only-begotten and well-beloved Son; and true believers cannot read, or hear, or think of forgiveness, without associating it in their minds with the inconceivable agony which Christ endured when he bought them with his own blood. The more lively, then, that their hope of forgiveness and their sense of safety is, the more profound will be their reverence and godly fear of that unspotted holiness and inflexible justice which required that He who is the object of their supreme affection, as well as God's own dear Son, should bear the infliction of divine wrath on their behalf; and they have thus in their own experience a clear explanation of what is related of Moses in the passage we have been considering, as well as of the declaration of the Psalmist, "There is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared."

XLI.

THE VEIL ON MOSES' FACE.

EXODUS XXXIV. 29-35.

It will be recollected that this was the second time that Moses had been with God on Mount Sinai,—that on both occasions he had spent forty days and forty nights in the mount, during which he did neither eat nor drink,—and that on both occasions he received, at the close of his interview with God, two tables of stone, on which were engraven by the finger of God himself the words of the covenant, the ten commandments. On the first occasion he was hastily dismissed from the mount, because the people of Israel had corrupted themselves, and gone astray, and made a graven image and worshipped it; and when Moses reached the camp, and found the people glorying in their shame, he did, under the impulse of holy and righteous indignation, cast the tables from him, and break them, as he afterwards expressed it, before their eyes, intimating, what was afterwards more distinctly told them, that they had broken their covenant with God, and forfeited all the blessings promised to Abraham. After repeated and very earnest supplications on the part of Moses, God was pleased to reveal his gracious purpose of renewing his covenant with them, and of continuing to vouchsafe his presence with them on their journey to Canaan. Moses was accordingly called up into the mount the second time, for the purpose of receiving anew the ten commandments, written, as before, with the finger of God on tables of stone; and it was on his

coming down from the mount this second time that, unknown to himself, "the skin of his face shone," so that "when Aaron and all the children of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone; and they were afraid to come nigh him."

No express reason is assigned for this remarkable appearance in the countenance of Moses, except that it was the consequence of God's talking with him,—the effect of his having been admitted to such an intimate communing with God, and to such a clear manifestation of the divine presence, as that there remained upon him somewhat of the dazzling glory on which he had been privileged to look. We cannot explain how this took place; but every one, I think, must feel as if somehow it were an effect which might have been expected, surrounded as Moses had been for so long a time with the cloud of glory, the symbol of God's immediate presence. And the practical purpose which it was fitted to serve in regard to Israel is abundantly obvious. That people were not only, in common with all men, open to impressions of a more vivid nature from sensible objects than from any statement in words, however solemn; but they had shown that they were peculiarly dependent on some outward sensible manifestation for any very deep or permanent impression. The demand which they made upon Aaron, to make them gods that might go before them, was virtually a declaration, that without some visible object whereon to look, they could form no vivid conception of the divine presence, and could exercise no firm confidence in the divine protection. And God had graciously accommodated his dealings with them to the infirmity of their nature, inasmuch as he had vouchsafed to go before them in a pillar of cloud and of fire, and had, moreover, intimated to Moses his purpose of taking up his permanent abode in the midst of them, saying, "Let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them."

When, therefore, on his coming down from the mount, the face of Moses shone with the reflected glory of the divine presence, and with such dazzling brightness that the people of Israel could not look upon and were afraid to come nigh him, there was thereby afforded such a proof of the divine authority under which Moses acted as was peculiarly fitted to carry conviction to their minds, and to awaken feelings both of profound

reverence and of holy confidence. There was not, perhaps, among all the miraculous appearances wherewith the people of Israel were favoured, any one that was better calculated to impress them with a feeling of the reality of God's nearness to them than the supernatural brightness with which the face of Moses shone when he drew near to them, with the tables of the testimony in his hand, and charged, moreover, with many gracious communications, as well as very solemn warnings and admonitions. Awful and impressive as were the thunderings and lightnings on Mount Sinai, we can conceive that more impressive still, though not so terrific, was the appearance of Moses, as described in the passage before us. It must have been to Israel as if a fellow-mortal had returned from the invisible world, bearing upon him the impress of that divine glory on which he had been permitted to gaze, and carrying with him a testimony from the very presence of God to the truth of all that he was commissioned to reveal. But encompassed as he was with this divine splendour, he was still the same Moses who had borne so patiently with all their waywardness and rebellion, and who had interceded so frequently, so earnestly, and so successfully on their behalf; and, therefore, at no moment, perhaps, did he so effectually command both the reverence and the confidence of Israel, as when they saw that "the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come nigh him."

This miraculous appearance in the person of Moses was obviously connected, as we have seen, with his having been forty days and forty nights in the mount, where the Lord stood with him in the cloud of glory. But it is a remarkable fact that on a former occasion, when Moses was admitted to an equally near approach to God, and for an equally lengthened period of time, no such effect seems to have been produced upon his person as we find described in the passage under consideration. We are naturally led, therefore, to connect the supernatural brightness which shone in his countenance with the peculiar nature of the manifestation which had been vouchsafed to him, and to conclude that it was designed to serve some further and important end besides that of furnishing a visible testimony to the divine authority by which Moses taught and acted.

And the revelation which God made of himself, on the occa-

sion referred to in the passage before us, was of a very peculiar kind. When Moses was first called up into the mount, it was to meet with God as the great Lawgiver; and it was in circumstances of such terrific grandeur that Moses himself was constrained to say, "I exceedingly fear and quake." When he was called up the second time, it was to receive the gracious assurance, that notwithstanding the great sin which Israel had sinned in making the golden calf, God was not to cast off and disinherit them,—that all the requests which Moses, one after another, had preferred on their behalf, had been granted,—and that the last and boldest of them all, namely, "I beseech thee, show me thy glory," was also to be granted, though not in the way that he expected, yet to an extent far beyond what he had ever conceived of. "Thou canst not see my face," that is, my glory in the sense in which thou hast asked, "for there shall no man see me, and live." But "I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee." And, accordingly, the Lord put Moses in a clift of the rock, and covered him with his hand while he passed by, and while he passed by before Moses, he proclaimed, "The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty."

This was, indeed, a manifestation of grace and mercy, such as was not, and could not be given when God revealed himself in the character of the Lawgiver; for in that character he could say nothing of forgiveness, nor proclaim any thing but that he would by no means clear the guilty. He did, therefore, literally make all his goodness to pass before Moses. But in doing so, he did also show him his glory in a way and to an extent that Moses had never conceived of; for in so proclaiming his name and his memorial, he announced the marvellous truth that God is the just God, and yet the Saviour,—that he can be just, and yet the justifier of the ungodly,—that there is a ground on which he can pardon the sinner, while he will not and cannot pass by or overlook sin without inflicting the penalty which he has threatened against it. And it is in this wonderful combination of justice and mercy,—of holy hatred of sin, and most

profound compassion for the sinner,—of inflexible rigour as the Lawgiver, asserting the honour and maintaining the integrity of his law, and of infinite love as the Saviour, working deliverance for sinners by the incarnation, sufferings, and death of the Second Person of the adorable Godhead,—it is in this combination, this harmonious union of apparently irreconcilable characters, that God has especially manifested forth his glory in the sight of angels and of men.

And it was thus that God was manifested to Moses on the second occasion of his going up into the mount. What difference there was between the actual visions which Moses saw on these two occasions we cannot tell, for we are not told. But it is plain that on the latter occasion there was a display of the divine glory such as Moses had never before seen; and we can clearly perceive, therefore, how befitting as well as gracious it was that this glory should be reflected in the face of Moses, in the sight of the whole congregation of Israel. They might generally, perhaps, see nothing attractive in that glory, as multitudes yet see nothing lovely or attractive in the glory of God as revealed in the face of Jesus Christ. But the blindness, and insensibility, and unbelief of men, detract nothing from the grace and mercy of God's dealings with them. There were true believers among Israel then, as there are in the visible Church now; and to them, even with all the darkness in which the glorious scheme of redemption was involved, there must have been much in the appearance of Moses, taken in connection with the proclamation of God's name which Moses was commanded to make to them, that was calculated to awaken their confidence towards God, as well as to fill them with holy awe. The latter feeling might be the predominant one, as it was with Moses himself, when, after hearing the proclamation of God's name, he "made haste, and bowed his head toward the earth, and worshipped." But there was much also in the message which Moses brought to them, and in the heavenly brightness with which his countenance shone, to assure them that the Lord was gracious,—that he had accepted the person of his servant, and granted his requests as their advocate and intercessor,—and that he had sent him back, not, as on a former occasion, to announce coming judgment on their transgression, but to assure them that he was "The Lord

God, merciful and gracious, ... forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin."

The subject of these remarks is, I think, illustrated, and their truth confirmed, by what we find related in the New Testament. None who are acquainted with the history of our Lord's manifestation in the flesh, as recorded by the evangelist, can fail to be reminded, on reading the passage before us, of a somewhat similar, but infinitely more glorious transaction which took place on the mount of transfiguration, and to which Moses was honoured to be a party. There, we are told, Christ "was transfigured," in the presence of Moses, and Elias, and the three favoured disciples, Peter, James, and John, "and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light." We are told, moreover, that, as in the case before us, a bright cloud overshadowed Christ and those with whom he held converse; and it is plainly intimated that this cloud was the symbol of the divine presence, inasmuch as an apostle has expressly designated it "the excellent glory." And, finally, we are told, that when Christ came down from the mount, all the people, of whom a great multitude had assembled around the other disciples, when they beheld him, were greatly amazed, and, running to him, saluted him,—a statement which, I think, does plainly intimate that his person still bore visible marks of that divine glory with which he shone, while encompassed with the bright cloud upon the mount.

In regard, then, to external and visible circumstances, we cannot avoid regarding Moses on Mount Horeb as a type of Christ on the mount of transfiguration,—while, in regard to the revelation of the divine character, it was in substance the same on both occasions. The subject of the converse which our Lord held with Moses and Elias was the decease which he accomplished at Jerusalem,—that death by which he was to demonstrate the great truth that God is the just God, and yet the Saviour; and the voice from "the excellent glory" bore testimony to Christ's work as that by which God was to be glorified, in the vindication of his rectitude, and the manifestation of his grace and mercy: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." It was the reflected glory of the Gospel, then, that shone in the face of Moses when he came down from the mount,

—a ray of the same glory which afterwards shone with excelling brightness in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

To what extent Moses was enabled to foresee and understand the mediatorial undertaking of the Redeemer, we cannot determine. But we cannot doubt that he was enabled to look beyond the dispensation which he was himself appointed to introduce, and to anticipate the glory which was afterwards to be fully disclosed to him, when he was privileged to revisit the earth,—the honoured attendant of the Redeemer on the mount of transfiguration. The dispensation which Moses introduced did at the best exhibit only a faint and imperfect revelation of the Gospel; nay, it did, in fact, invest the promise made to Abraham with an obscurity unknown to the patriarch, inasmuch as the law, which was added because of transgression, served but to convict of guilt without providing any relief from the condemnation which it passed upon the guilty, being designed to shut men up unto the faith which was afterwards to be revealed. So far, therefore, it was the ministration of death, bringing the conscience under the conviction of guilt, and leaving it there without remedy or relief. There was, indeed, relief provided from another quarter; for the promise, as renewed and sworn to Abraham, even the Covenant of Grace, remained sure, and divine ordinances were appointed as signs and seals of that covenant. Still, the whole dispensation was dark,—the law, which in itself was the Covenant of Works, requiring obedience on pain of death, generated a spirit of bondage, —while the intimations of a new and better dispensation were but faint and shadowy representations. But through and beyond these Moses had been enabled to look. Like Abraham, he saw the day of Christ, and was glad. The revelation of the divine character as the Lord God, merciful and gracious, invested with a divine glory even "the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones,"—and we cannot doubt that the dazzling brightness which shone in his countenance was an emblem of the joy and gratitude which filled his heart, when, on returning to the people of Israel, with the tables of the law in his hand, that law which passed sentence of death on every transgressor, he could proclam God's name and memorial to be "The Lord God, merciful and gracious, . . . forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin."

But the children of Israel, we are told, were not able to look

on the supernatural light with which the face of Moses shone; for "they were afraid to come nigh him,"—"and till Moses had done speaking with them, he put a veil on his face." And so it might have been expected. They had not been favoured as Moses was with a vision of the divine presence, when the Lord made all his goodness to pass before him; nor had there been unfolded to them such views of the glory of God as Moses was privileged to contemplate, when the eye of his faith was directed beyond mere types and shadows to the day of Christ himself. The law which Moses brought with him a second time from Sinai, though a testimony to the glory of God's character as the just and righteous God, was still to them the ministration of death; and they could not look beyond the rites and ordinances which were shadows of better things to come, so as to realise vividly the very substance of the things themselves. "The children of Israel could not," therefore, "steadfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance," regarding that glory as a manifestation of the glory of God in his character as the great Lawgiver; and neither could they steadfastly look to the end of that dispensation which was to be abolished, so as to anticipate the glory that was then to be revealed in the character of God as the Saviour.

And hence the apostle takes occasion to contrast the full and clear revelation of the new dispensation with the dim and shadowy intimations of the old, and to exhibit, in a very striking light, the superior privileges of believers now, as compared with those of the Old Testament Church. He refers to the glory which shone in the countenance of Moses, and speaks of it as a bright display of the divine character, shining amidst the darkness of a dispensation, the leading feature of which was that it was the ministration of death. Even in that dispensation, wherein the law in all its rigour and inflexible justice occupied so prominent a place, the glory of the Gospel, as reflected from the face of Moses, was such that the children of Israel could not look upon it. No doubt this was partly owing to the spirit of bondage under which they were brought by the demands of the law, conscious as they were that they had sinned grievously, and had incurred the utmost severity of the punishment which the law had denounced against offenders. But if such, the apostle argues,—if such was the glory of the old dispensation,

under which the law was revealed in all its terrors, while the intimations of the Gospel were but faintly shadowed forth in types and figures, how full, how unclouded, how effulgent the glory of that dispensation which exhibits the law, not only satisfied to the uttermost of its demands, but magnified and made honourable by the infliction of its sentence in a way which demonstrates its inflexible rigour, as the punishment of sinners never could have demonstrated it,—and a dispensation, moreover, in which all the types and figures of a former dispensation have been fully realised in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, —"God manifest in the flesh,"—the brightness of the Father's glory, "and the express image of his person!" "If the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not steadfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which glory was to be done away; how shall not the ministration of the Spirit be rather glorious?" "For if that which is done away was glorious, much more that which remaineth is glorious. Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech: and not as Moses, which put a veil over his face, that the children of Israel could not steadfastly look to the end of that which is abolished."

The end or accomplishment of the old dispensation was to be the manifestation of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Of this glory Moses had been favoured with a special revelation,—and he was himself made a type of Christ in the brightness with which his countenance shone in the sight of the people of Israel. But they could not see so far as the end of the dispensation under which they lived. Besides the dimness of the types themselves whereby the glory of New Testament times was foretold and prefigured, they were held in a state of bondage by the demands of the law, so that they were not able to look upon the face of Moses, though it exhibited but a faint reflection of the glory of Christ, who was to be revealed as "the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth." As the veil on the face of Moses concealed the glory of his countenance; so the law concealed that brighter glory which was one day to be revealed, when the Word was to be made flesh, and was to dwell among men, and they were to behold his glory, the

glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

This revelation has been made, and believers now are permitted to look, and can without fear or dread look on the unveiled glory of God, shining in the face of Jesus Christ. There, indeed, he is still revealed as the just God, the holy and righteous Lawgiver,—and revealed more gloriously even in this character than he was amidst the thunders and lightnings of Sinai. But he is revealed also as merciful and gracious; and the ground on which he can be so is so fully and clearly explained, that the more deeply believers are impressed with a sense of his inflexible justice, the more profound will be their views of the riches of his grace and mercy. In this respect their privileges are greater, not merely than those of the people of Israel, but even than those of Moses himself; for however large and clear might be the discoveries that were made to him of the divine character, still the great mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh, was not revealed; and, therefore, with all that he foresaw of the glorious consummation of his own economy, he still fell short of the humblest of believers now, of whom it can be said, that He "who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in their hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ."

And if such be the fulness of the revelation of God, as the Lord God, merciful and gracious, which believers now enjoy, how full also should be their peace, and how abundant their consolation! If sinners rightly understand and have truly embraced the Gospel, the manifestation of God's unspotted holiness and inflexible justice may and will awaken very profound reverence and godly fear, but will not and cannot generate any feeling of dread or distrust; for that justice, having been fully satisfied by Christ's obedience unto the death, will serve to give them a deeper insight into the unsearchable riches of the grace and mercy which provided for them a way of escape from the punishment which it must have inflicted. And if such be the rich provision which has been made for quieting their guilty fears, and imparting peace to their conscience, what manner of persons ought they to be in all holy conversation and godliness? And if they do feel the constraining influence of this considera-

tion, they cannot fail to find, in the subject before us, a very instructive lesson as to the means by which they are to be brought into a conformity to the divine will, and transformed into the divine likeness. The external appearance of Moses underwent a marvellous change in consequence of his being admitted into the divine presence, and favoured with a clear revelation of the divine character; and this fact can hardly fail to suggest to believers, that the still clearer manifestation of the character of God with which they are now favoured is surely fitted and designed to effect some change upon them.

And such is the practical application which an inspired apostle has made of the subject before us. He plainly intimates, that the glory which shone in the face of Moses was but an emblem of the moral and spiritual beauty which gradually gathers upon the soul of the believer from the habitual contemplation of the character of Christ. "But we all," says he, "with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." And so it must be with every believer, not merely as a matter of consciousness to himself, but as a thing that may and ought to be palpable to others. In the case of those who have been turned from a course of folly and sin, and after much perplexity and spiritual distress have found rest and peace in Christ, the change which they undergo, in regard to life and character, will often be as marked as if it had been effected by an immediate operation of miraculous power, as in truth it really is, being nothing less than the work of the Spirit of God,—the agency of Him who in the work of creation moved upon the face of the waters. But however palpable this change may be, it is not at once complete, and it is carried on, the apostle says, through the habitual contemplation of the glory of the Lord, whereby the Holy Spirit gradually transforms them into the image of Christ. The study of Christ's character, then, becomes the great business of believers,—that with which their growing comfort is inseparably connected. It is by the daily contemplation of the divine excellence and loveliness of that character, that they will discover the defects and deformities of their own; and as they grow in resemblance to him, they will abound in peace and consolation.

Nor is it on their own account, and for themselves alone, that

they should thus seek to resemble Christ. To reflect his image is at once the duty which he requires of all his people, and the honour with which it is his purpose to adorn every one of them; and there is no condition, however humble, nor any sphere, however limited, in which this honour may not be enjoyed and this service rendered. To reflect Christ's image is the most glorious distinction to which a human being can aspire,—and it is a distinction which is accompanied with no pride, and which creates no envy,—for they who have attained to it in the largest measure will ever be the most anxious to discover it in others, and every new instance in which they do so discover it in a fellow-creature will be a new accession to their own joy and happiness.

And is it thus that we are seeking to grow in the knowledge and the likeness of Christ? Oh! let us beware of resting contented with some such attainments in the Christian life as may have placed us on something like a level with the general character of professing Christians around us. There is a tendency thus to settle down into a state of indolence and inaction in regard to spiritual attainments, as if nothing more were necessary, nothing that required any anxiety and effort, beyond our finding some measure of comfort and good hope in resting on Christ's finished work. The tendency is a very dangerous one, and, if yielded to, will in the end leave us as little of peace and solid comfort as we have of holiness.

How different was the principle on which the apostle acted! With all the progress which he had made in the divine life, and all that he had been enabled to manifest of Christian holiness and devotedness to God's glory, we find him saying at a very late period of his spiritual warfare, "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." And such must be the principle on which we act if we would either enjoy in all its fulness the peace and consolation of the Gospel, or would manifest aright our gratitude to Him who has bought us with his own blood, and whom we are bound, therefore, to glorify in our bodies and in our spirits, which are his. There is no point

at which we are to rest contented short of an entire conformity to the image of the Son of God. It is by reflecting his image that we are to glorify him on the earth; and it is in having this image perfected in our nature that we are to find our blessedness hereafter. "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is."

XLII.

THE TESTIMONY PUT INTO THE ARK.

EXODUS XL. 20, 21.

It must have occurred to every one who has read with attention this and the preceding fifteen chapters, that of all the gorgeous things therein described, connected with the tabernacle and its furniture, the most imposing, and that which most deeply rivets the attention, is the ark of the testimony. In itself, indeed, it was a very simple thing. It was a coffer or chest of shittim wood, two cubits and a half in length, a cubit and a half in breadth, and a cubit and a half in height,—exquisitely beautiful, no doubt, in its proportions, but on that very account more simple in its appearance. It was, however, overlaid within and without with pure gold, having a crown, or rim or edging of gold, round about. But even this conveys the idea rather of solidity and simple beauty than of any thing splendid and dazzling. Yet with all its simplicity, and surrounded as it was with every thing which, as to material, colour, and workmanship, was fitted to astonish or delight the beholder, it is still the object on which the devout reader, in perusing these chapters, will be disposed to dwell with solemnity and holy awe; for such a reader cannot fail to perceive that it was for the concealment and safe custody of this ark,—this simple chest or coffer,—that the tabernacle, with all its costly and splendid decorations, was mainly constructed.

This is evident from the whole history of the construction of the tabernacle. When Moses went up into the mount to receive

instructions as to the manner in which he was to provide for the residence of God in the midst of Israel, he was told what were the various materials which he was to receive as a free-will offering at the hand of the people. "The Lord," we are told, "spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring me an offering: of every man that giveth it willingly with his heart ye shall take my offering. And this is the offering which ye shall take of them; gold, and silver, and brass, and blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine linen, and goats' hair, and rams' skins dyed red, and badgers' skins, and shittim-wood, oil for the light, spices for anointing oil, and for sweet incense, onyx stones, and stones to be set in the ephod, and in the breastplate. And let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them. According to all that I show thee, after the pattern of the tabernacle, and the pattern of all the instruments thereof, even so shall ye make it." And having thus instructed Moses as to the gifts or free-will offerings which he was to receive at the hand of the people, and the purpose generally for which they were to be received,—namely, to make him a sanctuary that he might dwell among them,—the Lord gave him more special instructions as to the great work which he was to undertake; and the first of these was the construction of the ark, and the purpose which it was to serve. "And they shall make an ark of shittim-wood: two cubits and a half shall be the length thereof, and a cubit and a half the breadth thereof, and a cubit and a half the height thereof. And thou shalt overlay it with pure gold, within and without shalt thou overlay it, and shalt make upon it a crown of gold round about. And thou shalt cast four rings of gold for it, and put them in the four corners thereof; and two rings shall be in the one side of it, and two rings in the other side of it. And thou shalt make staves of shittim-wood, and overlay them with gold. And thou shalt put the staves into the rings by the sides of the ark, that the ark may be borne with them. The staves shall be in the rings of the ark: they shall not be taken from it. And thou shalt put into the ark the testimony which I shall give thee." Such was the first, the leading part, of the special instructions given to Moses respecting the structure of the sanctuary in which God was to dwell among the people of Israel. And this was immediately followed by orders respecting the place and cir-

cumstances in which the ark was to be placed; for in the very next verse the Lord proceeded to say, "And thou shalt make a mercy-seat of pure gold: two cubits and a half shall be the length thereof, and a cubit and a half the breadth thereof. And thou shalt make two cherubims of gold, of beaten work shalt thou make them, in the two ends of the mercy-seat. And make one cherub on the one end, and the other cherub on the other end: even of the mercy-seat shall ye make the cherubims on the two ends thereof. And the cherubims shall stretch forth their wings on high, covering the mercy-seat with their wings, and their faces shall look one to another; toward the mercy-seat shall the faces of the cherubims be. And thou shalt put the mercy-seat above upon the ark; and in the ark thou shalt put the testimony that I shall give thee. And there I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy-seat, from between the two cherubims which are upon the ark of the testimony, of all things which I will give thee in commandment unto the children of Israel."

The passage which I have now quoted is followed by lengthened and most minute instructions regarding the tent or tabernacle, within which the ark and the mercy-seat with the cherubims were to be lodged; and nothing can be conceived more splendid or magnificent than the description given, through several successive chapters, of the materials, construction, and furniture of that tabernacle. But it must be obvious to every attentive reader, that, of all the objects of glory and of grandeur there described, the ark, with the mercy-seat and cherubims over it, was, with all its beautiful simplicity, the most imposing. Its importance is plainly marked out by its being the first in order of the many subjects on which Moses received instructions, as if thereby to intimate that every thing else in the structure of which he received a divine pattern was to be subservient to and for the accommodation of the ark.

But still more plainly are its importance and sacredness manifested by the purpose which it was to serve, and the place which it was to occupy, when the tabernacle was completed. It was to contain the testimony which God gave to Israel, the two tables of the law, or ten commandments, written by the finger of God himself, and constituting the covenant which he made with them

at Sinai,—the charter on which they were to hold the continued and peaceable possession of Canaan. This testimony or covenant formed the ground-work of all God's future dealings with Israel as his chosen people, and the security of all the privileges which in that capacity they enjoyed. It was to them, therefore, the most sacred, as it was the most valuable, of all that the tabernacle did or could contain,—and its preservation and safe-keeping the most important of all concerns. Whatever else there might be in and about the tabernacle, either of beauty or of grandeur, to awaken their interest, the ark of the testimony must have been the special object of their veneration and concern, as containing that sacred deposit which constituted the security of all their privileges, and by which God was to manifest his faithfulness as the covenant-keeping God. And the importance which was attached to it was still more plainly intimated by the place which it was to occupy in the tabernacle. It was to be placed under the mercy-seat and the cherubims, in the holy of holies, or most holy place,—an apartment separated from the rest of the tabernacle by a veil or curtain, into which none were permitted to enter, saving only the high priest, and even he only on one day of the year. From this mercy-seat, between the cherubims, God was to commune with Moses of all things which he was to give him in commandment unto the children of Israel; and there also he was to take up his abode with them by a visible symbol of his presence in the cloud of glory. A character of peculiar sacredness was thus given to the ark of the covenant or testimony, which could not fail to impress the people of Israel with reverence and awe, as that with which God did more immediately connect the manifestation of his presence and the revelation of his will. And when we reflect that the instructions given to Moses for preparing the tabernacle in which the ark was to be deposited have been twice recorded with the greatest minuteness of detail, and that a similar description has also been recorded of the temple afterwards erected by Solomon for the more permanent residence of the same ark, we cannot doubt that the subject is, and is intended to be, full of interesting and important instruction to the Church in all times respecting the character and perfections of God.

The truth of this remark is abundantly obvious in regard to God's immediate dealings with the people of Israel. Agreeably to the promise sworn unto Abraham, and repeatedly renewed to Isaac and Jacob, he had brought that people out of Egypt, and had conducted them so far on their way to Canaan, when he was pleased to enter into covenant with them, pledging his faithfulness and truth not only to bring them into that land, but to keep them in the undisturbed possession of it so long as they adhered to the conditions of that covenant, the ten commandments, which he prescribed as the rule of their conduct. The more deeply to impress these commandments on their conscience, he had spoken them in the hearing of all the people, —being the only words which he did so speak, all his other instructions being delivered to Moses personally. Having so spoken them, he wrote them on tables of stone; and when thus brought into a permanent state, he commanded them to be put into the ark, and deposited in the most holy place, which was guarded by the most solemn sanction, all being forbidden to enter it on pain of death.

The people of Israel were thus warned, in a manner the most impressive, of the terrible consequences of breaking God's covenant; inasmuch as they could not look towards the place where the ark was deposited, and where the pillar of cloud rested, without being reminded that God himself, the great Lawgiver, was there present, ready to assert the authority and to vindicate the honour of his law, by the immediate infliction of punishment upon transgressors. Of this, indeed, they were constantly reminded by the very sight of the tabernacle generally, the magnificence of its structure, and the solemnity of its service; for every thing in and about it gave intimation of the presence and the purity of God,—of their unfitness to approach him, and of their need of an atonement for the guilt which they were daily contracting. And from time to time the rigour of the law, which had been promulgated with so much solemnity amidst the thunders and lightnings of Sinai, and had been laid up and preserved with so much care in the ark, was actually carried into effect in the punishment of offenders; inasmuch as from time to time individuals who sinned presumptuously, and with an high hand, against that law, were put to death, either by the judicial

sentence of those who were appointed to administer it, or by the immediate visitation of God himself.

And while the people of Israel were thus reminded, by the ark of the covenant, of the presence of God in the midst of them, ready to assert and vindicate his authority by the immediate infliction of his righteous judgment on the presumptuous transgressor of the law which every Israelite saw so solemnly deposited in the most holy place, it was by means of the same ark that God did manifest his own power and truth as the faithful and covenant-keeping God. From the day on which Moses "took and put the testimony into the ark, and set the staves on the ark, and put the mercy-seat above upon the ark, and brought the ark into the tabernacle, and set up the veil of the covering, and covered the ark of the testimony,"—from that day, the ark may be said to have been the guide of the people of Israel, the pole-star of the Church for eight and thirty years during her wanderings in the wilderness; for though it was still the pillar of cloud by day, and the pillar of fire by night, which went before the Israelites to guide them, and to find out for them a resting-place during that long sojourn, yet this pillar was never separated from the ark of the testimony from the day on which they were united. The ark was at once the guide and the security of the people of Israel. And many were the wonderful deliverances which were wrought for Israel by means of or in connection with that sacred pledge of God's presence and faithfulness.

When Israel reached the banks of Jordan, and were commanded to pass over on a given day,—the very day on which the river annually overflowed his banks, and on which, therefore, it was impossible to cross it,—no sooner had the soles of the feet of the priests who bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord, the Lord of all the earth, rested in the waters of Jordan, even in the brim thereof, than the waters of Jordan which came from above stood and rose up upon an heap, and those from below were cut off, so that the priests that bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord stood firm on dry ground in the midst of Jordan, and all the Israelites passed over on dry ground, until all the people were clean passed over Jordan. In like manner, in the first warlike expedition on which Israel were commanded to enter after pass-

ing Jordan, I mean the siege of Jericho, it was by means of the ark that the conquest was made; for we are told that "the Lord said unto Joshua, See, I have given into thine hand Jericho, and the king thereof, and the mighty men of valour. And ye shall compass the city, all ye men of war, and go round about the city once. Thus shalt thou do six days. And seven priests shall bear before the ark seven trumpets of rams' horns; and the seventh day ye shall compass the city seven times, and the priests shall blow with the trumpets. And it shall come to pass, that when they make a long blast with the rams' horn, and when ye hear the sound of the trumpet, all the people shall shout with a great shout; and the wall of the city shall fall down flat, and the people shall ascend up, every man straight before him." And so it was, that when the ark of the Lord had compassed the city, going about it once every day for six days, and on the seventh day seven times, and when at the seventh time the people shouted, the wall fell down flat, and every man went up straight before him into the city, and they took the city.

These are examples of the power and faithfulness of God, as pledged to Israel, when he condescended to enter into covenant with them, and not only committed the covenant to writing, but commanded it to be placed in safe keeping, and took it so immediately under his own protection, that whithersoever it was carried, a divine power visibly accompanied it. And so it was, not only while Israel, as in the cases now referred to, adhered to God's covenant, and implicitly trusted to his promise for deliverance in the time of trouble; but even when they had begun to backslide, and had become unsteadfast in his covenant, he did not at once forsake them, but, in his long-suffering patience, continued still to accompany his ark with such manifestations of divine power as very clearly to prove, that if his covenant with Israel was broken, it was not broken on his part. A remarkable instance of this vindication of his truth and faithfulness we find recorded in the history of Israel during the time of Eli, and immediately after the call of Samuel to the office of a prophet. The army of Israel had been defeated in battle by the Philistines,—a sure token that God had a controversy with them. But instead of humbling themselves before God, con-

fessing their sin, imploring his forgiveness, and placing themselves under his protection, according to the appointed order, they betook themselves to the desperate expedient of bringing his ark into the field of battle, evidently with more of the superstitious feeling with which the heathen nations around them regarded their false gods, than with the enlightened reverence and child-like confidence with which they were taught and encouraged to repose in the power and faithfulness of the God of their fathers. They presumptuously supposed,—reckoning on the forbearance which they had long abused,—that God would not and could not permit the ark of his covenant to fall into the hands of the heathen; as if he were bound by that covenant, however far they had departed from it. In righteous judgment on their daring presumption, he gave them up to defeat, and his ark itself into captivity. But even then, when to all appearance he had cast off his people, and left them without the token of his presence and the pledge of his protection, he did not fail to vindicate his power and faithfulness as the covenant-keeping God, by visiting with judgment those who had sought to make void his covenant by carrying in triumph to the house of their god the sacred ark which contained his testimony, and in connection with which he had already done so great things for Israel. The idol of the Philistines fell prostrate and mutilated before the ark of the covenant of the Lord; and whithersoever that ark was carried, it spread disease, and suffering, and death among the people, till, idolaters as they were, they were compelled to send it back, and with it a sin-offering to the God of Israel.

There is in all this most important instruction, in the way both of warning and encouragement, to the Church in every age. Though there be no longer a visible token, like the ark, of God's presence with his people, or a miraculous interposition, like that which never failed to accompany the ark amidst all its wanderings, and all the neglect with which it was at times treated; yet God is as really present in his Church now, as the ark of the covenant ever was with Israel of old. That ark,—a sacred and holy thing as it was, and accompanied, as it never failed to be, with a manifestation of divine power to protect it against insult, and to give to it the victory,—when used, as the people

of Israel were authorised to use it, for covering their head in the day of battle, was, after all, only a type or faint emblem of the presence of Christ in his Church. And viewing it in this light, the history of the ark, which is a very large and copious one, furnishes manifold and most important practical lessons. It explains many of the events which have befallen the Church since Christ's appearing,—plainly intimating that if the people of God have at times fallen into trouble, and have been ready to conclude that God has cast them off and forsaken them, it is because of their sin in having forgotten and forsaken him in whom their strength lies. And it teaches them, moreover, that if ever they are to experience his returning favour, and receive new intimations of his regard, it must be by deep humility on their part, a confession of sin, and an earnest supplication for mercy to pardon, and grace to help them in the time of need. But if they do so return to him, he will assuredly return to them. They will find that, though they had neglected his ark, and had ceased for a season to inquire at it, yet he had never forgotten his covenant,—and that, though backsliding children, yet on returning to him, he will heal their backslidings, receive them graciously, and love them freely.

But though the ark of the covenant, considered simply in its relation to the people of Israel, and the purpose which it was designed to fulfil, as a pledge of God's power and faithfulness to carry into effect all that was promised in the Sinai covenant,—though, even in this view of the ark, it is full of instruction as illustrating the character of God, and exemplifying the care which he exercises over his church and people; yet there is something far more profound than this in the history of the ark, the purpose for which it was constructed, and the situation in which it was placed. There was something peculiarly solemn, and fitted to awaken feelings of the deepest reverence, in the holy jealousy with which God watched over the ark, and guarded it against profanation or insult. Not only was it placed, as we have already seen, in the holy of holies, where the cloud of glory resting over it prevented any from approaching it; but when the cloud was taken up, and the tabernacle was to be removed, certain persons only were permitted to bear the ark, and again to set it in its place. We read that when it was re-

turned by the Philistines, and was come to Beth-shemesh, the Lord "smote the men of Beth-shemesh, because they had looked into the ark of the Lord, even he smote of the people fifty thousand and three score and ten men,"—so that the people cried out, "Who is able to stand before this holy Lord God?" And at a future period, when David brought up the ark from the house of Abinadab to Jerusalem, and when Uzzah, the son of Abinadab, who drave the new cart whereon the ark was placed, "put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it, for the oxen shook it," we are told that "the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the ark of God."

We cannot doubt that the great purpose for which the ark was thus invested with a character of such mysterious sacredness, was to teach Israel, and to teach men of all times, the unchangeable holiness and inflexible rigour of the divine law,—to show that no one violation of its authority could be passed by without a righteous retribution,—and to convince sinners how unfit they are to approach the divine presence,—how unable to stand before the holy Lord God. And in nothing is this truth more impressively taught than in the place which the ark occupied in the holy of holies. There, indeed, as all Israel knew, God was manifested on a mercy-seat, constantly reminding them, and in a most emphatic manner, of the proclamation of his name and his memorial which he had before given to Moses, when he declared himself to be the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin; and it was the knowledge of this fact, the assurance that there was a mercy-seat on which the cloud of glory rested, and before which the blood of their sacrifice was sprinkled by the high priest, that could give them any confidence, or relieve their conscience from that load of guilty fear by which it must otherwise have been overwhelmed. But this mercy-seat was placed upon the ark of the covenant, whereby it was as plainly and emphatically intimated that the exercise of mercy did not and could not interfere with the integrity of the divine law. That law was laid up in a place the most sacred and most secure. It was guarded by the very presence of the Lawgiver himself, who sat enthroned in glory between the cherubims,—and every thing about it

did very impressively declare the sacredness which attached to it.

And hereby was foreshadowed the great mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh,—that alone which has fully explained the marvellous truth that God, even on a throne of mercy, can and does maintain the integrity of his law. It was known from the beginning, that on the one hand God is merciful, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin,—and that on the other, he will by no means clear the guilty. But the full and clear explanation of these apparently irreconcilable truths was reserved for the appearing of Him of whom the ark was one among manifold predictions and types. And it was a very significant type. As it was to the ark that the two tables of the law were committed for preservation; so it was committed to Christ to preserve the integrity, to maintain the honour, and demonstrate the inviolable sanctity of that law. And it is not enough to say that the law being in his heart, he yielded a willing obedience to all its requirements, and satisfied its demands by fulfilling all righteousness. He magnified and made it honourable, as it never could have been even by the unsinning obedience of every intelligent creature in the universe. As the sacredness of the ark was never so clearly manifested, or so solemnly asserted, as when the mercy-seat was over it in the holy of holies, as if to intimate that the mercy-seat was designed to cover or protect it,—as if mercy were exercised for the very purpose of demonstrating the purity and rectitude of the divine commandment; so the law never did and never could appear so glorious, so rigorous in its demands, and so inviolable in its sanctity, as when Christ, in saving the guilty, fulfilled its requirements, and endured its penalty even to the uttermost. The very mercy of God has thus served to assert and maintain the holiness and rectitude of his law, as they never could have been in the punishment of the guilty. And it is this that lies at the foundation of the hope and confidence of believers. That hope rests not on the idea that the divine law may relax its demands so that they may escape. Were such an idea necessary to give them any hope, they must remain in a state of tormenting uncertainty and fear; for who could ever assure them that the law will so far relax as to reach their case, and allow them to go free? But the law

with which they have to do knows nothing of relaxation ; and as it is the conviction of its inexorable justice, absolutely excluding all hope, that first drives them to Christ for refuge ; so when they have fled to him, the same views of the law will not only shut them up to the necessity of cleaving to him as all their righteousness and all their salvation, but will strengthen the assurance that the law has been satisfied,—that its very rectitude is their security,—that it is magnified and made honourable in their salvation,—and that God is just in justifying him that believeth in Jesus.

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